MIDDLE EAST@WAR No.35

AIR POWER AND THE ARAB WORLD

1909-1955

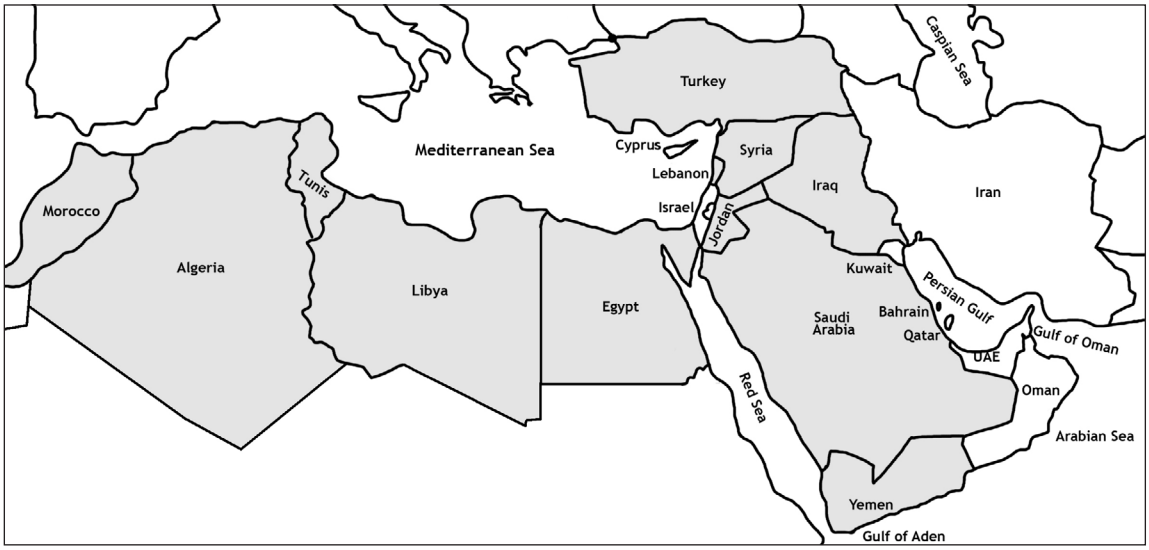
VOLUME 4: THE FIRST ARAB AIR FORCES, 1918-1936

Dr David Nicolle &
Air Vice Marshal Gabr Ali Gabr

MIDDLE EAST@WAR SERIES

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements		2
Preface		2
Introduction		2
Part One: The Arabs Look to the Skies		3
1	The Post-war Years in Egypt and Iraq	3
2	The Post-war Years in Other Arab Territories	14
Part Two: The First Arab Air Forces		22
3	Abd al-Karim's Dream of an Air Force	22
4	From a Hijazi to a Saudi Arabian Air Force	27
5	Yemen's Forgotten Fliers	41
6	The Creation of the Royal Iraqi Air Force	48
7	From Egyptian Army Air Force to Royal Egyptian Air Force	62
Bibliography		101
About the Authors		104



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DEDICATION

For Air Commodore Abd al-Moneim Miqaati (8 July 1904 – 5 April 1982) in memory of a meeting in Groppi's in 1970.

"Be done with this and be a man. After the league of the lions, let us have a conspiracy of mice, and pull this piece of machinery to the ground. You were brisk enough last night, when nothing was at stake and all was frolic. Well, here is better sport; here is life indeed." (Robert Louis Stevenson, *Prince Otto: A Romance*, 1885)

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In a spirit of fairness, it should also be pointed out that a few of these enthusiasts come from 'the other side of the hill', in Israel, where they have braved criticism by providing sometimes sensitive information and by also questioning the accepted 'facts' as presented by official Israeli sources.

David Nicolle also wants to thank those who helped him with translations, especially Waleed Mikaati, Ali Tobchi and Hebatallah Ghanem. Their work on the REAF Operational Diary from the Palestine War (1948-49), which was written in often hurried Arabic handwriting and was only available in a low definition scan of a 'third carbon copy', was invaluable. Other documents, such as scraps cut from old magazines and then photographed by mobile phones, were almost as difficult to decipher. Nevertheless, we still wish to mention the following people, whose contributions were vital:

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PREFACE

Where the problems and pitfalls of writing about Arab air forces and their confrontation with the Israeli Air Force are concerned, we can do no better than quote directly from Lon Nordeen's work, *Middle East Air War Overview*:

> The Middle East is a very challenging area to identify air warfare claims and losses. All of the participants (Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon and Israel) have demonstrated superior skills in maintaining security, secrecy and using press reports to paint the best picture for their side. Determining the truth in this region is along the same lines as assembling a jigsaw puzzle; movement of lots of pieces (of information) to slowly reveal an image but almost never the whole picture. Unlike Rene Francillon's OVERKILL analysis of North Vietnamese and U.S. air warfare claims, there is no official Arab or Israel document available to use as a reference which is independent and verified. So, the following is an analysis using the best information from a multitude of sources.

INTRODUCTION

THE MILITARY AND CULTURAL SITUATION OF THE ARAB LANDS AFTER THE GREAT WAR

This book will not attempt to present the complex history of the Arab world and its neighbours during the inter-war years but will focus upon the emergence of the first Arab air forces. The most powerful military forces in the Middle East during this period were, of course, those of the colonial empires, while Turkey rapidly re-emerged as a significant regional player. Where local armies were concerned, the most important in political and military terms were Egypt and the soon-to-be-created state of Iraq. Saudi Arabia emerged during these years and soon dominated a greater part of the Arabian Peninsula, yet it remained a poor and backward country, though not as backward as its neighbour to the south, the still-independent Imamate and Kingdom of Yemen. Everywhere else, the Arab peoples were either directly ruled by, or were more or less subservient to, one of the colonial powers.

PART ONE

THE ARABS LOOK TO THE SKIES

1

THE POST-WAR YEARS IN EGYPT AND IRAQ

EGYPT

The crisis of 1919-21 led the British government to replace its protectorate over Egypt with recognition of Egyptian independence which came into effect on 28 February 1922 when martial law was finally lifted. A couple of weeks later, on 15 March, Sultan Fu'ad became King Fu'ad. However, ex-Khedive Abbas Hilmy II, who had been removed from the Egyptian throne on British insistence in December 1914, refused to renounce his and his son's claims to the throne. Abbas Hilmy did not formally abdicate until 1921, after which he lived in Switzerland, from where he would proclaim his support for the Axis Powers during the Second World War. The ex-Egyptian ruler eventually died on 19 December 1944. At the other end of the political spectrum, the Egyptian Communist Party was formed in 1922 but failed to win much support. It was nevertheless banned in 1925; not for last time.

On 19 April 1923, a little over a year after Fu'ad was crowned king, an Egyptian constitution came into effect. This was greeted with great optimism, despite the fact that many people were disappointed that it made no mention of Egyptian sovereignty over the Sudan. This omission was clearly a result of British pressure, and the difficult question of the Sudan was set aside for future negotiations between Cairo and London. In practice, much remained as it had been before, with a substantial British Army presence in Egypt and the Sudan, while British officers continued to hold senior ranks in the Egyptian Army and Police. British civilian officials similarly remained in place in the administration, especially where Egyptian finances were concerned. Nevertheless, there was a widespread feeling that Egypt had won a political victory. Further afield, many people considered that a precedent had been set because one of the mighty European colonial powers had been obliged to accept an independent authority within an occupied area of the Middle East.

For many in Egypt, especially within the Egyptian military, the fate of a handful of Saharan oases and a much larger area of barren desert soon came to represent the hollowness of their country's newly achieved independence. Indeed, Egypt seemed to be the only country (except Russia, which had collapsed into revolution) whose armies had been actively involved on the winning side during the First World War, only to lose territory as a result of the post-war peace treaties. In practice these supposedly unimportant areas of the Sahara were ceded from both Egypt and the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan as a result of agreements between the British and the Italians, with grudging acceptance by the newly, if nominally, independent Egyptian government.

The first and, for Egyptian nationalists, the most painful of these losses was the oasis of Jaghbub, north-west of Siwa, which was handed over after negotiations in 1924-25. Jaghbub had been visited by the English explorer and adventuress Rosita Forbes in 1920, in company with the Egyptian scholar, adventurer and soon-to-be enthusiastic pilot Muhammad Ahmad Hasanain (see Chapter Seven for Hasanain Bey's efforts to make his country 'air minded'). Jaghbub had been at least nominally Egyptian for a long time, though there was currently no Egyptian military or civil presence. Instead, this substantial oasis had been a spiritual, cultural and military centre for the Sanussi movement since around 1890. According to some sources, the Sanussi arsenal in Jaghbub contained 400 rifles, 200 swords and other weapons for 3,000 men, plus four small artillery pieces obtained from Egypt. There may also have been a gunpowder factory. The religious students in Jaghbub reportedly received military training every Friday, including archery, which must surely have served as a spiritual rather than a military discipline. A library included around 8,000 books, some of them rare and valuable old Arabic texts.

At the end of the Great War, the British Foreign Office had signalled its willingness to support the idea of ceding Jaghbub to Italy in return for Italian recognition of Egyptian sovereignty over the little Mediterranean frontier port of Sollum, which the Egyptians already controlled. This idea was then included in a draft treaty sent to the Italian foreign minister in April 1921, though Egyptian officials were not informed of the proposal for two months. At that time, the Egyptians, who had yet to achieve formal independence from the British occupation authorities, made no public comment on such a proposed exchange. For its part, the Italian government also failed to respond until April the following year, by which time Egypt was theoretically independent. Thereafter the British virtually washed their hands of the matter, insisting that it was for Egyptian and Italian officials to reach a satisfactory conclusion.

On 31 October 1922, the Fascist leader Benito Mussolini came to power in Italy. At first little changed, but in 1924 increasing unrest in Cyrenaica, the Libyan coastal province neighbouring Egypt, was blamed by the new Fascist government on infiltration from the nominally Egyptian oasis of Jaghbub. Italian military commanders also claimed that Bedouin tribes based around Jaghbub were responsible for organising resistance to Italian rule along the coast – at that time the only part of Cyrenaica securely held by Italian forces – and for smuggling weapons from Egypt to 'rebels'. Several armed clashes also resulted in Italian air and ground units being brought closer to Jaghbub (see Volume Three).

In 1924, British officers in command of Egyptian units were instructed to turn a blind eye to Italian incursions across the frontier if these were believed to be in pursuit of rebels or smugglers. Meanwhile, the Egyptian government called upon Hasanain Pasha to lead negotiations with Italy. In November that year, the Egyptian government, headed by the veteran nationalist Sa'ad Zaghlul, collapsed before further steps could be taken concerning Jaghbub. So, despite the Italian government pressing for a readjustment of the frontier, no more discussions took place until February 1925, by which time Italian military operations had greatly increased in the desert south of Sollum. There were also frequent reports of Italian violations of the existing frontier, and even of Italian military units taking up positions inside Egyptian territory. Nevertheless, the Egyptian Army and Coastguard were

in no condition to do anything about it. For their part, the British seemed to do nothing.

On 20 February, the Italian ambassador in Cairo handed over a formal request that Egypt cede the oasis of Jaghbub. The new Egyptian government under Ahmad Ziwar Pasha refused to discuss the matter until what it described as Egypt's generally unsettled conditions had stabilised, though the new prime minister did suggest that a temporary solution be sought. In contrast to such a measured and even timid reaction by the Egyptian government, Egyptian newspapers were horrified by what they interpreted as Italy's sudden and threatening demand. Numerous articles were published rejecting any changes to the frontier. This was followed by rumours that Italian troops had seized Jaghbub, and in March 1925, several Egyptian newspapers started demanding that an expeditionary force be sent to defend this oasis, where, it was reported, local people had requested Egyptian military protection. One newspaper, *Al-Ahram*, also reported that the Egyptian garrison at Sollum had been attacked by Bedouin tribesmen, which led to additional troops being sent there. In reality, of course, the tiny Egyptian Army could not have taken on the combat-experienced Italians.

The question of the western frontier now became a political battleground between Egypt's main political parties, with the Wafdists and newspapers sympathetic to them claiming that, if the present government agreed to cede Jaghbub to the Italians, it would be betraying the people of Cyrenaica, who had been struggling against 'imperialist invaders' since before the First World War. At the same time, the British government knew that public opinion in Britain generally favoured the Italians, who were still seen as allies from the Great War, rather than Egyptians, whom prevailing racist sentiments characterised as 'wogs' or 'Gyppos'. Furthermore, there was a growing feeling in Egypt that Britain saw its interests as being in line with those of Italy, rather than with Egypt. In truth, the British government wanted a peaceful solution to avoid being drawn into a confrontation with Mussolini's government.

In April 1925, Cairo announced that Egyptian Army units which were being withdrawn from Sudan on British insistence, would instead be deployed to al-Arish in Sinai. This caused outrage amongst nationalists, who urged that these troops should be sent to defend "the threatened western frontier". Around the same time, British military planners declared that a firm Egyptian possession of Sollum on the coast was much more important than Egypt holding what many British officials regarded as the 'insignificant' oasis of Jaghbub. They claimed, with some justification, that modern mechanised warfare meant that those who could securely hold the Sollum area, would also hold the oasis of Siwa to the south. Siwa would in turn block the desert route into Egypt from Jaghbub, south of the Qatara Depression and through the oases south-west of Cairo.

While the government of Ahmad Ziwar Pasha seemed unable to make a firm decision, Britain still appeared to favour Italy. Mussolini brought matters to a head in May, the Fascist dictator publicly claiming that Jaghbub belonged to Italy. Feeling that it could no longer count on British support, the Egyptian government agreed to negotiate. The subsequent talks were prolonged and far from easy. In November, with no satisfactory end in sight and public anger threatening to spill onto the streets of Egypt, the British High Commissioner in Cairo, Sir George Lloyd, warned King Fu'ad that he would be held personally responsible if negotiations failed. On 6 December 1925, this threat caused the Egyptian government to sign an agreement which recognised Italian sovereignty over Jaghbub in return for Italian recognition of full Egyptian control over a small but strategically important piece of frontier territory close to Sollum.

The agreement between Egypt and Italy also guaranteed Muslim access to the tomb of Sayyid Muhammad Ibn Ali al-Sanussi, founder of the Sanussi movement, who had died in Jaghbub in 1859. Nevertheless, in almost all other respects Egyptian nationalists felt that their country had lost out, one newspaper lamenting that the agreement with Italy would "disgrace Egypt in the eyes of Islam". Many secondary school students, plus some university students, protested in Cairo, and popular opinion was so hostile that the Egyptian government dared not bring the agreement to parliament for ratification. One recently elected Wafdist MP named Abd al-Rahman Hassan Azzam, who had fought in the Libyan resistance against Italian forces from 1915–23, wrote in the respected Cairo daily newspaper *Al-Ahram*: "With the disappearance of al-Jaghbub from the map of Egypt, gone too is Egyptian peace and security. Now more than ever before we have to rely on British assistance." Later in 1945, Abd al-Rahman Azzam would become the first Secretary-General of the Arab League.

Meanwhile, back in Cairo, the government of Ahmad Ziwar Pasha fell and the Wafd Party returned to power under Sa'ad Zaghlul in January 1926. Zaghlul, however, died on 23 August 1927. After the conclusion of these difficult and controversial negotiations with Italy, King Fu'ad appointed Hasanain Pasha as one of Crown Prince Faruq's tutors, a role he would carry out with others including General Abd al-Aziz al-Masri. It was in this highly charged period that a new cohort of young men joined the Egyptian Army as officer cadets. Amongst them would be the country's first three military pilots: Muhammad Abd al-Muna'im al-Miqaati, Ahmad Ibrahim Abd al-Raziq and Fu'ad Abd al-Hamid Haggag (see Chapter Seven).

Egypt had also claimed Kufra, which consisted of a larger collection of oases south of Jaghbub. However, there was no Egyptian presence in what had become another important Sanussi centre. Over 300 kilometres south-east of Kufra lay yet another series of even more mysterious oases around al-Uwaynat, situated in deep desert on the edge of the Gilf Kibir plateau. Unknown to Europeans and largely forgotten even in Egypt, al-Uwaynat had been a vital watering place on the trans-Saharan caravan route between the Libyan coast and Darfur in the Sudan during medieval and early modern times. Egyptians played an active part in exploration of the most distant corners of their country, including the search for al-Uwaynat and the so-called 'Lost Oasis of Zerzura'. The Egyptian government was similarly concerned about defining the state's boundaries in such regions, especially given the aggressive behaviour of Fascist Italy in neighbouring Libya. Expeditions were therefore sponsored by the Royal Automobile Club of Egypt and leading newspaper *Al-Ahram*.

Thus, al-Uwaynat was first explored for the outside world by the Egyptian scholar and adventurer Muhammad Ahmad Hasanain Bey in 1922. Sent by King Fu'ad to study this practically unknown part of the Sahara, Hasanain had set out from Sollum on the Mediterranean coast, travelling via Siwa, Jaghbub and Kufra. From there he crossed the eastern parts of French Equatorial Africa, ending at al-Ubaid in Sudan's Darfur province. Ahmad Hasanain's account of his epic journey, and particularly his mention of al-Uwaynat oases, Jabal (Mount) Uwaynat and the neighbouring Jabal Arkenu – together with the activities of the

Sir Ahmed Hassanein Bey with his DH.60 Moth at Heston Aerodrome on 20 January 1930. (Albert Grandolini collection)

Hungarian explorer, pioneer pilot and desert specialist László Almásy – are said to have inspired Michael Ondaatje's book *The English Patient*, which was made into a successful film in 1996.

Al-Uwaynat subsequently fell within a broad strip of territory, running south from Jaghbub to the Sudanese frontier, which was ceded to Italy. Also ceded was a huge area of desert referred to as the Sarra Triangle, which, as the most north-westerly part of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, stretched from the current Sudanese frontier through the oasis of Ma'tan al-Sarra to the foothills of the massive Tibesti Mountains. These Egyptian territorial concessions, made at a time of increasing Egyptian nationalism, caused further resentment, not least within the Egyptian military. They were, nevertheless, agreed by Sadiq Wahba Pasha, Egypt's 'envoy extraordinary' and minister plenipotentiary, though only under heavy British pressure.

It is often said that the Egyptian government was reluctant to get involved in disputes in other parts of the Arab world during the inter-war years. These disputes included a hard-fought war between the Hashemite Kingdom of Hijaz and the Sa'udi family or clan for domination of the Arabian Peninsula. Then there was the expanding Zionist Jewish colonisation of Palestine. Egyptians – or at least their government representatives – are said to have been similarly reticent during a clash between Yemen and Saudi Arabia over the disputed region of Asir in 1933–34. However, such an interpretation of Egyptian policy is exaggerated for the 1920s and incorrect for the 1930s. For example, in the mid-1920s, King Fu'ad tried to improve Egyptian relations with Imam Yahya of Yemen. Then in 1931-32, King Fu'ad's government clashed with the recently established Republic of Turkey over the question of whether the ex-Khedive Abbas Hilmy II of Egypt might be considered as a candidate for the position of King of Syria. This was, of course, an empty gesture, as the French – who held the League of Nations mandate over Syria and Lebanon – would have none of it.

In reality, most politically minded Egyptians focussed upon internal matters during the inter-war years. This was true of the country's small but expanding educated elite, and especially of rising generations of highly politicised students. Indeed, the quasi-fascist Misr al-Fatat organisation, otherwise known as 'Young Egypt', was founded by a young lawyer named Ahmad Husayn in 1933, primarily to counterbalance the influence of the more liberal Wafd Party amongst Egyptian students. It would have a significant impact on many of those joining the Egyptian Army as officer cadets in the mid- and later 1930s. In other respects, the major issues of the day revolved around Egypt's own tense relationship with the United Kingdom, which was still generally seen as an occupying power, even after the granting of Egyptian independence.

On 28 April 1936, King Fu'ad of Egypt died, an event which marked the end of an era, not only within the country but also in Egypt's relationship with the British Empire. The crown of Egypt and, at least nominally, that of the Sudan now passed to Fu'ad's popular 16-year-old son Faruq, who came to the throne amidst a general atmosphere of optimism.

MESOPOTAMIA-IRAQ

The post-Great War British military occupation of ex-Ottoman Mesopotamia was replaced by a British mandate, in an arrangement agreed at the San Remo Conference on 25 April 1920, where the mandate was authorised under Article 22 of the still-new Covenant of the recently established League of Nations. However, a widespread revolt broke out in various parts of the proposed territory in 1920, even as officials of the British Colonial Office were working out how their new administration would operate. This Iraqi Revolt, or Great Iraqi Revolution as it is often called, was so serious that the British chose to fundamentally change their approach following the deaths of more than 2,000 British and Imperial soldiers (see Volume Three for British air operations in Iraq). Instead, they decided to establish a new Kingdom of Iraq. This would be ruled by a member of the same Hashemite family whose efforts to establish a kingdom in Syria were thwarted by the imposition of a French mandate in what are now Syria and Lebanon. Thus, the Hashemite Kingdom of Iraq was created on 23 August 1921 under British control and tutelage, still under the terms of the League of Nations mandate, and with King Faisal I – ex-King of Syria – at its head. He was the third son of Amir Husayn Ibn Ali al-Hashemi, the Sharif of Mecca and leader of the Arab Revolt during the First World War.

King Faisal's position was then legitimised by a plebiscite, though this operation did little to quell the fears of substantial minority populations who saw the Hashemite monarchy as a means of imposing Sunni Arab domination. The first Anglo-Iraqi Treaty was signed in October 1922, after which the Kingdom of Iraq remained a semi-independent state until the signing of a second Anglo-Iraqi Treaty in 1930 ushered in a greater degree of real independence. In practice, however, Iraq was only granted

this still somewhat theoretical independence on 3 October 1932, with the official end of the British mandate, a year after the Iraqi Air Force was formed.

King Faisal of Iraq was trusted by the British and remained relatively popular amongst some of the most powerful groups within Iraq. Unfortunately, he died in Switzerland on 8 September 1933 in slightly mysterious circumstances (see Chapter Six). The newly formed Royal Iraqi Air Force (RIrAF) was still too small, too inexperienced and lacked suitable aeroplanes to bring the king's body home, so the RAF's No. 70 Squadron was given this responsibility. No. 70 Squadron was currently based in Iraq and was already responsible for the airmail route between Baghdad and Cairo, so one of its Vickers Victoria transports was sent to Beirut in French mandated Lebanon, where King Faisal's body would arrive by aeroplane.

Amongst those involved was a British air-gunner named Spencer Ernest William Viles, who recalled: "[W]e went over, and I was with Sergeant Sweet and Sergeant Sully, [the] first and second pilots, on a Vickers Victoria, and we picked his body up in the coffin at Beirut and brought him back to Baghdad and sent [it] to the palace. And he was buried in Baghdad and his son Faisal II took over." In fact, Faisal I was succeeded by his son, King Ghazi, rather than by his grandson, Faisal II, who only came to the throne in April 1939; this being one of several errors in Sergeant Viles' largely unpublished recollections.

Unfortunately, the British plan to create an entirely new and somewhat artificial state of Iraq assumed that the significant cultural, religious and linguistic differences amongst the inhabitants of the old Ottoman *wilayats* could be dealt with as and when problems arose. This was, to say the least, an optimistic approach to a complex part of the world. On the other hand, the claim made by modern commentators that there had never been an independent state of, or in, Iraq since ancient times is misleading. One only has to look at the medieval and early modern periods between the fragmentation of the Abbasid Caliphate in the 9th century and the incorporation of Iraq into the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century to see that, while there were times of acute fragmentation, there were also periods when flourishing states consisted of roughly the same area as present-day Iraq. There were, of course, also times when what is now Iraq formed part of much larger states, some of which had their capital in Iraq.

The British-imposed Hashemite Kingdom of Iraq found itself trying to rule a remarkably varied population. This included Shi'a Arabs in the south, Sunni Arabs in the centre, west and north, Lurs (also called Faylis) in the south-east who spoke an Iranian language, Kurds in the east and north, as well as substantial Christian communities in various areas, most notably the Assyrians of northern Iraq. There was also a large and very long-established Jewish community, plus smaller religious sects which predated the arrival of both Christianity and Islam, of whom the Yazidis of north-western Iraq were perhaps the most numerous.

The British mandatory authorities did little to ease tensions between these communities, and in some cases exacerbated them. This was particularly true where the Christian Assyrians and Muslim Kurds were concerned. During the British occupation, Shi'a Arabs and Sunni Kurds both fought for independence, while the British employed the Assyrian Levies to help quell these insurrections. Later, the cementing of Sunni Arab domination under a now theoretically independent Hashemite Kingdom was followed by further unrest amongst Assyrians, Yazidis and Shi'a, as well as the almost always discontented Kurds. All these risings were ruthlessly crushed by the British and their Hashemite protégées. Then, in 1936, Iraq witnessed the first of the military coups which would blight its history for much of the rest of the 20th century.

MILITARY MATTERS

Few in the Arab world, and none in the various Arab military leaderships, failed to recognise the increasing importance of air power at the end of the Great War. This had been most obviously demonstrated in the Middle East and North Africa by the British and French, but also by the Ottoman Empire and its German ally (see Volumes One and Two). However, the circumstances which existed immediately after the First World War clearly did not allow Arab ambitions for their own air forces to be fulfilled. Even in Egypt, which had the most established modern military structure, the British were in a position to quash any such attempts, and did so emphatically.

The granting of independence to Egypt on 28 February 1922 had been a unilateral British move and included significant limitations, especially in military matters. Not only did the British

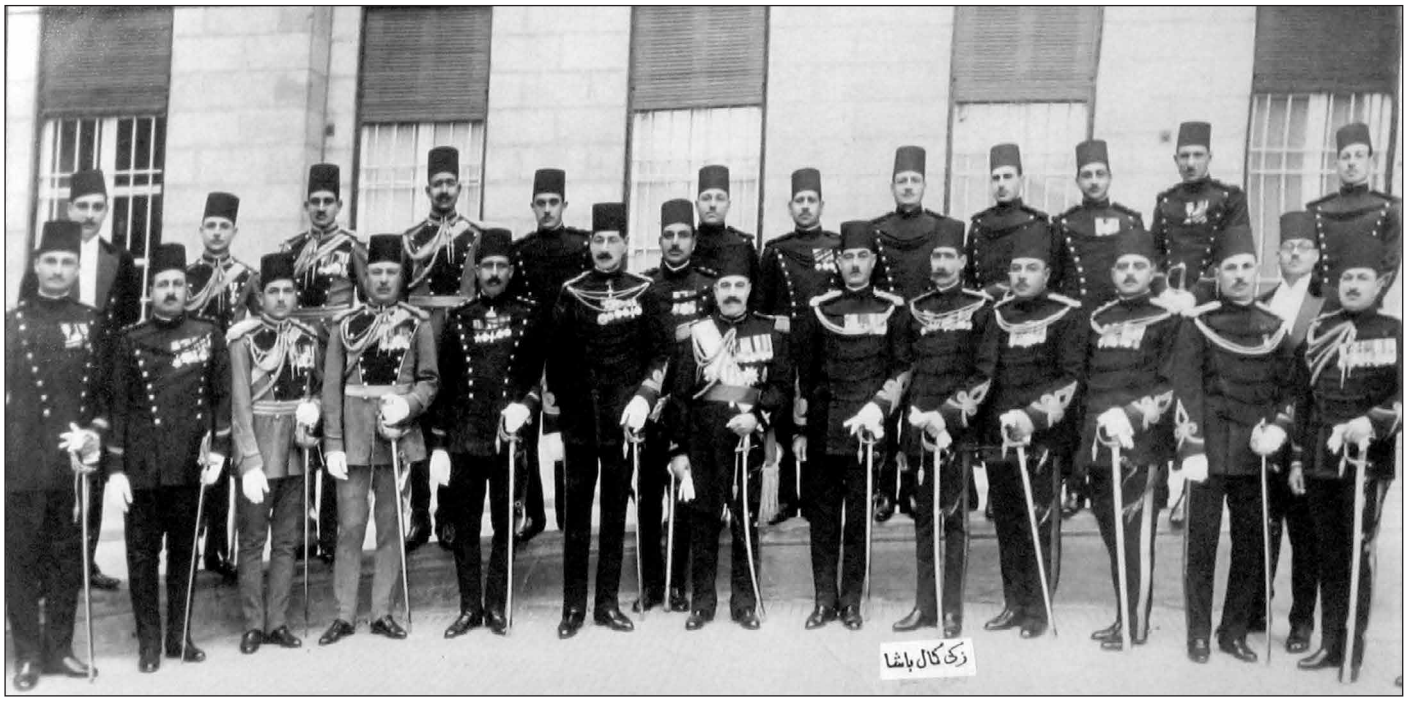
An aerial view of the aerodrome at al-Qantara close to the Suez Canal and next to the huge British and Egyptian military encampment, photographed shortly after the end of the Great War in 1918. (Author's collection)

Bimbashi Iskander Abdo Agami of the Royal Egyptian Medical Corps and his wife c.1921. He is wearing full dress winter uniform with the British and Egyptian medals he earned during the First World War. (Agami family archive)

Army remain on Egyptian soil while British officers commanded Egyptian troops and police in Cairo and Alexandria, but British complacency reached a quite staggering level. This was clearly reflected in the attitudes of British officials towards the Egyptian military. For example, following internal disturbances during 1919 and 1920, the British contrasted the isolated cases of mutiny in the Egyptian Army with what they termed the Army's admirable behaviour during the Great War, stating that it "was an encouraging if modest reminder that all ideals had not perished in the confusion which overtook Egypt in the spring of 1919".

On the other hand, it is generally agreed that practical considerations rather than ardent nationalism or political enthusiasm were the main reason why many young Egyptian men wanted to become officers. These included a desire for financial security and social prestige. Even in the 1930s, political motivations remained secondary for the great majority of officer cadets. Nevertheless, a claim by the respected historian P.J. Vatikiotis that Egypt lacked an aristocratic military tradition like Britain or France, or a "feudal recruiting ground for professional soldiers" like Germany, overstates the case. There was still a profound attachment to the Egyptian ruling dynasty founded by Muhammad Ali, at least within the country's relatively small aristocratic elite. One such family can be taken as an example; that of Muhammad Zaki Kamal Pasha, both of whose sons would join the Egyptian Air Force (EAF). As Fu'ad Kamal explained when interviewed by the author, "My father was an officer in the Egyptian Royal Guards in the 1920s and later, and my grandfather had been in the Egyptian Army in the 1890s during the [Anglo-Egyptian] reconquest of the Sudan. My great-grandfather was in the government. Our family was of Circassian origin and originally came from Turkey with Muhammad Ali [at the start of the 19th century]."

Fu'ad Kamal followed his brother into the Royal Egyptian Air Force (REAF) in 1950, flying MiGs against the Israelis in 1956 (as part of the EAF) and 1967 (as part of Egypt's United Arab Republic Air Force, or UARAF). His elder brother, Kamal Zaki, had joined the REAF in 1946, flew Spitfires against the Israelis



Officers of the Egyptian Royal Guard in 1934. Muhammad Zaki Kamal Pasha stands in the front row, fifth from right. His sons, Kamal Zaki and Fu'ad Kamal would both be fighter pilots in what became variously called the Royal Egyptian Air Force, the Egyptian Air Force and the United Arab Republic Air Force, before once again becoming the Egyptian Air Force. (Fu'ad Kamal family archive)

The Abu Zaid family around 1930. Abd al-Hamid Abu Zaid of the Egyptian Coastguard stands at the back with his wife and daughter while at the front are two future well-known Royal Egyptian Air Force Pilots: Muhammad Abu Zaid in the centre front and Mustafa Abu Zaid on the right. The youngest son on the left did not join the REAF. (Abu Zaid family archive)

during the Palestine War of 1948 and subsequently served in the Egyptian diplomatic corps. This group in society continued to supply the Egyptian Air Force with some of its most highly educated, outward-looking and skilled officers for many decades. Indeed, it still does to this day. Furthermore, many in what might be called the old Egyptian Army officer corps, both senior and junior, shared the anger of more overtly political nationalists on the streets when it came to the way in which the British coerced the Egyptian government into handing over Jaghbub oasis and other Saharan territory to the Italians during the 1920s.

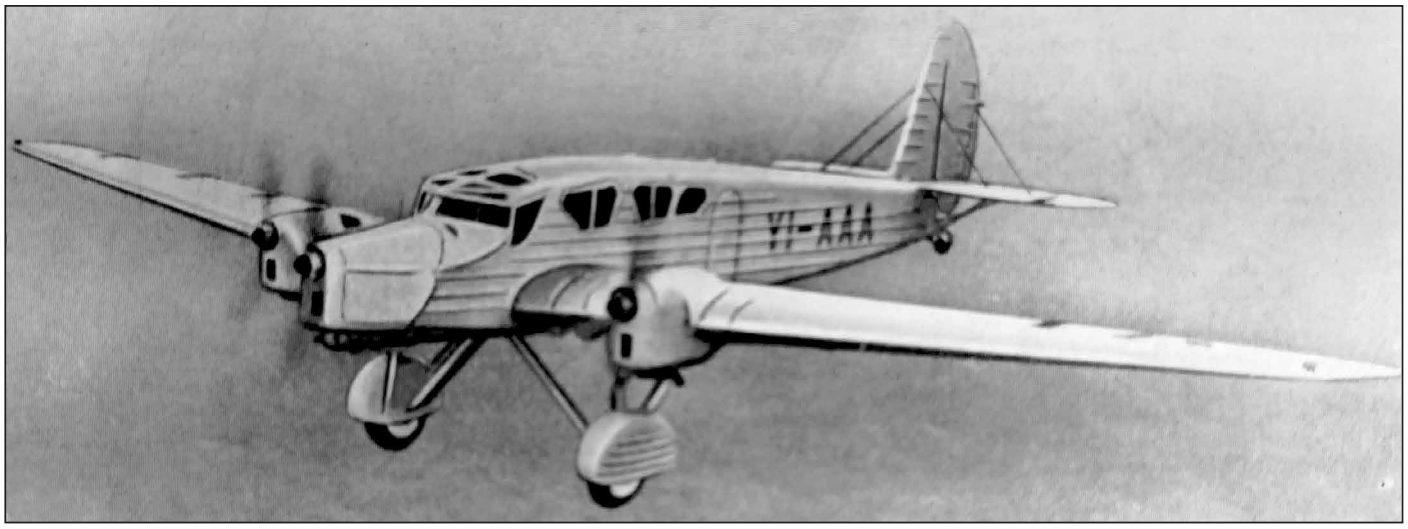
Vatikiotis maintained that, prior to the reforms of the early and middle 1930s, "For a long time the officer corps was controlled by the monarch, and [was] fairly isolated from the rest of society and its political upheavals … It was the regime's shield against disorder." This much was true, but when Vatikiotis also wrote that the Egyptian officer corps "was not fashioned by an elite with a corporate ethos and links with a parallel civilian class in society", his sweeping generalisation only had justification before the old and very restricted officer corps was opened to wider recruitment during the later 1930s. Thereafter, many officer recruits were attempting to escape crushing economic and other problems, while also being increasingly alienated from their country's political, social and military 'establishments'.

It is also interesting to note that, despite his position as Inspector General of the Egyptian Army, Abd Aziz al-Masri may never have officially become an Egyptian officer, only having been commissioned in the Ottoman Turkish Army. Even within Egypt, al-Masri was little more than a figurehead, having little contact with those younger officers who considered the general to be out of touch with modem military ideas. In this respect they were being rather unfair, for al-Masri had a full appreciation of air power. Meanwhile, his championing of mules rather than motor vehicles as military transport in mountainous terrain would be justified in Burma during the Second World War, and in Afghanistan more recently.

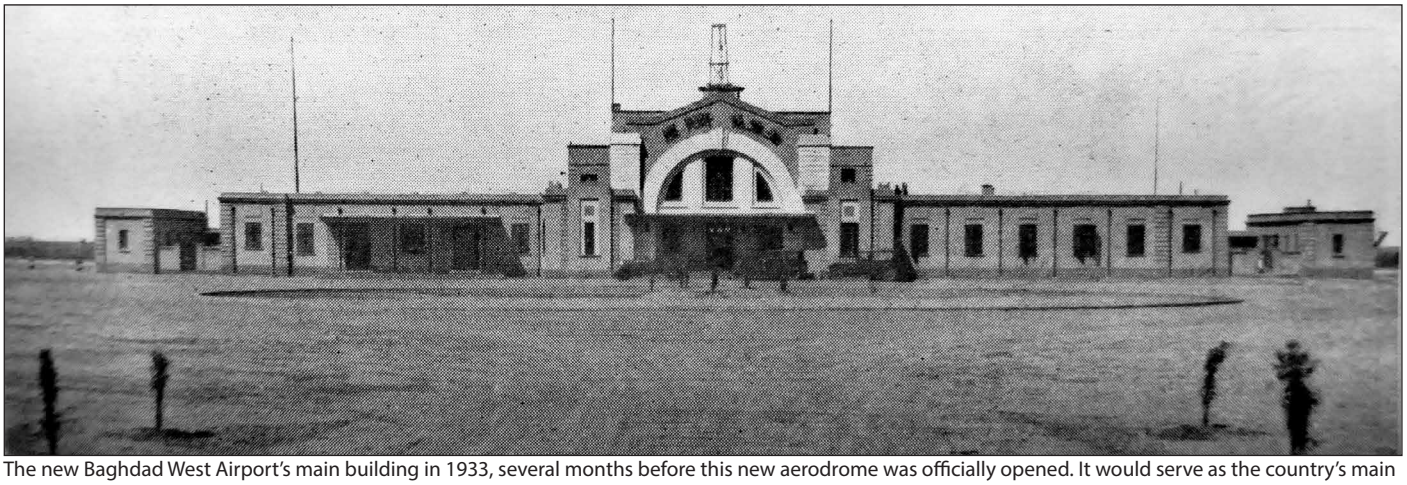
Meanwhile, recruitment for the non-commissioned ranks of the tiny Egyptian Army was not a problem because there were plenty of volunteers in a poor country where military service provided regular pay and medical services. It was only following the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936, and the subsequent expansion of Egypt's armed forces, that this situation changed.

During the Mesopotamian campaign of the First World War, the British had attempted to enlist the support of various Iraqi tribes as well as existing auxiliary police units. Some did, in fact, half-

Recruits to the Iraqi Levies or Arab Mounted Police in 1918 or 1919. (Iraqi Ministry of Information)



A heavily retouched photograph of the Spartan Cruiser 2 supplied to Iraq Airwork Ltd. and given the first Iraqi civil registration, VI-AAA. The picture was used to advertise the not particularly successful Spartan Aircraft Company in *The Aeroplane* magazine on 8th March 1933. The business would be merged with Saunders Roe in 1935. (Author's collection)



The new Baghdad West Airport's main building in 1933, several months before this new aerodrome was officially opened. It would serve as the country's main civil airport for decades. (Author's collection)

King Ghazi I, the new ruler of Iraq, opened Iraq's new Baghdad West aerodrome during a dust storm in mid-December 1933. (Author's collection)

heartedly and temporarily support the British until their conquest of Baghdad in March 1917. Thereafter, increasing numbers of tribal forces came to the conclusion that the Ottoman Empire would be defeated and so switched sides. Meanwhile, the British started making concerted efforts to win local support. However, the lack of any British declaration in favour of Iraqi independence seriously undermined these efforts.

Lieutenant General Maude, the new British commander on the Mesopotamian front, had been keen to encourage Arab tribesmen to attack his enemy's communications, especially after the combat theatre split the territory of the powerful Banu Shammar Jarba' tribe. Some of its members began harrying the retreating Ottoman forces in 1918, but the greater part of the Banu Shammar nevertheless remained loyal to the Ottoman sultan until the end of the war. Nor were British efforts to win over the local population helped when, during the month before the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) became the Royal Air Force (RAF), it was used to put down disturbances in the Shi'a holy city of Najaf. In the month after it became the RAF, it also bombed an Arab tribe in the middle Euphrates area which had refused to pay taxes.

More effective from a British point of view were the *shabana*, an Arab auxiliary police force that started being recruited from northern and western tribes. Men, selected with the help of their own tribal leadership, were trained, armed and uniformed along similar lines to those of the British Indian Army. By the end of the campaign, the numbers of *shabana* had risen to approximately 2,000 men, mostly Arabs but with a few Kurds. Their officers and NCOs were drawn from former Ottoman troops and leading tribal families. They were supported by another auxiliary force recruited from the Bedouin and led by Major J.I. Eadie of the British Indian Army. Known as The Muntafiq Scouts, they were recruited from 1917 onwards and, after the war, evolved into the Iraqi or Assyrian Levies, who were neither Arab nor Bedouin. Towards the very end of the Great War, yet another paramilitary levy known as The Kurdish Horse was raised by Major Sloane in the eastern mountains around Khanaqin.

The final phase of the Great War in Mesopotamia was a particularly confused and, in the eyes of future British administrators, 'untidy' business. The British had, for example, promised to help the Christian Assyrians and Nestorians in both the northern and north-western districts. Yet in the summer of 1918, these people had been virtually overwhelmed by a Turkish and Kurdish counterattack, which caused many Christian communities to flee south. About 2,000 of their men were then recruited into the Iraqi Levies, which consequently became, over time, a largely Christian Assyrian force. Shortly after the Great War ended, this force proved its reliability by defending Mosul against a feared Turkish attempt to regain control of northern Iraq in 1919. Turkey continued to claim this area because Ottoman forces had still been in control at the time of the armistice, only being forced out by the British after fighting had supposedly ended. Not until 1926 was this frontier question resolved.

As the first official Iraqi military force to be established by the British, several battalions of the Levies were tasked with guarding RAF aerodromes and other facilities in Iraq from which the British controlled the country. It was largely after the installation of Hashemite King Faisal I as a client ruler over the British mandated kingdom in August 1921 that the British authorities selected members of the Sunni Arab elites for government and ministerial posts in Iraq. The existing Iraqi forces also became the Royal Iraqi Army, which totalled over 3,500 men by 1922. The British and the Iraqis then formalised the relationship between their two countries with the first Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1922.

Faisal had wanted an army of 6,000 men, while the British mandate authorities in Iraq had insisted on a maximum of 4,500, so there was still some way to go. Furthermore, the Iraqi or Assyrian Levies remained under British control and had British officers, while their recruitment remained a British affair. With a strength

Portrait photograph of Prince Abbas Halim in flying gear, perhaps taken in the final months of the First World War, after which he appears to have shaved off his small moustache. (Author's collection)

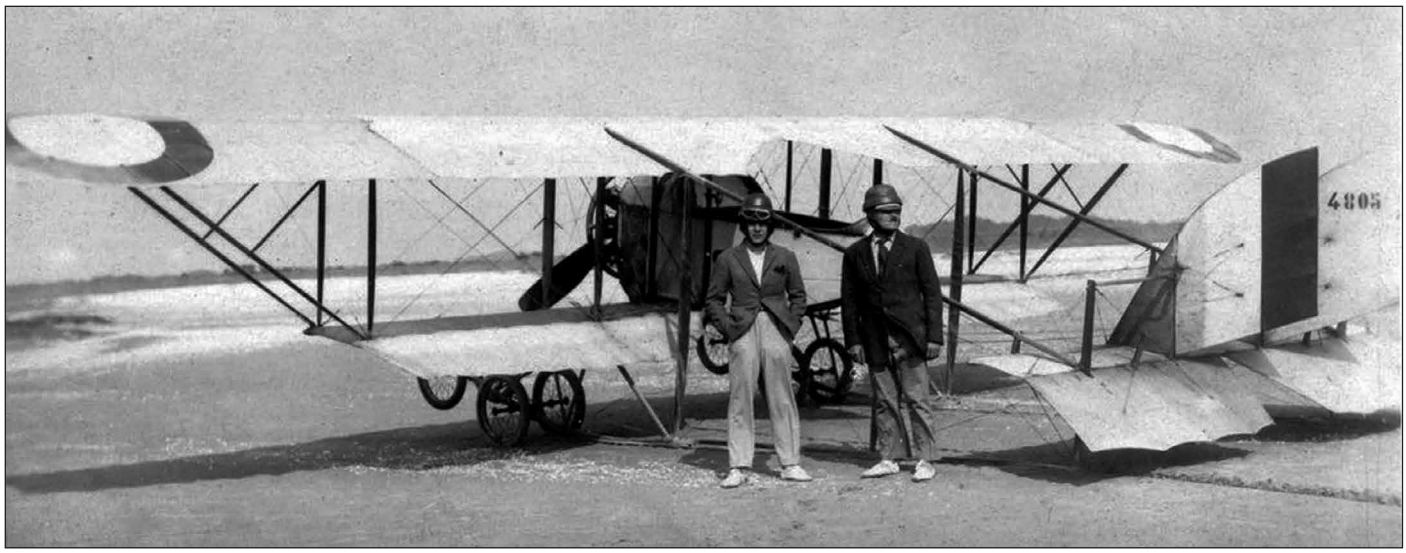
An Egyptian flying student named Abd al-Hamid Ahmad Efendi in a Dietrich DP.IIa. This German trainer aircraft first flew in 1923 and the writing on the fuselage suggests that the photograph was taken at the Staaken aerodrome outside Berlin, probably in the mid-1920s. (Author's collection)

of just under 5,000, these Levies still outnumbered the actual Iraqi Army. Their strength increased to approximately 7,500 in 1925, remaining around that figure until 1933, by which time the Levies consisted of six infantry battalions, three cavalry regiments, two mountain regiments and one field artillery battery. Unfortunately, but perhaps not surprisingly, the strength and status of the largely Christian and British-dominated Iraqi Levies was widely resented by the Muslim majority population, both Arab and Kurd.

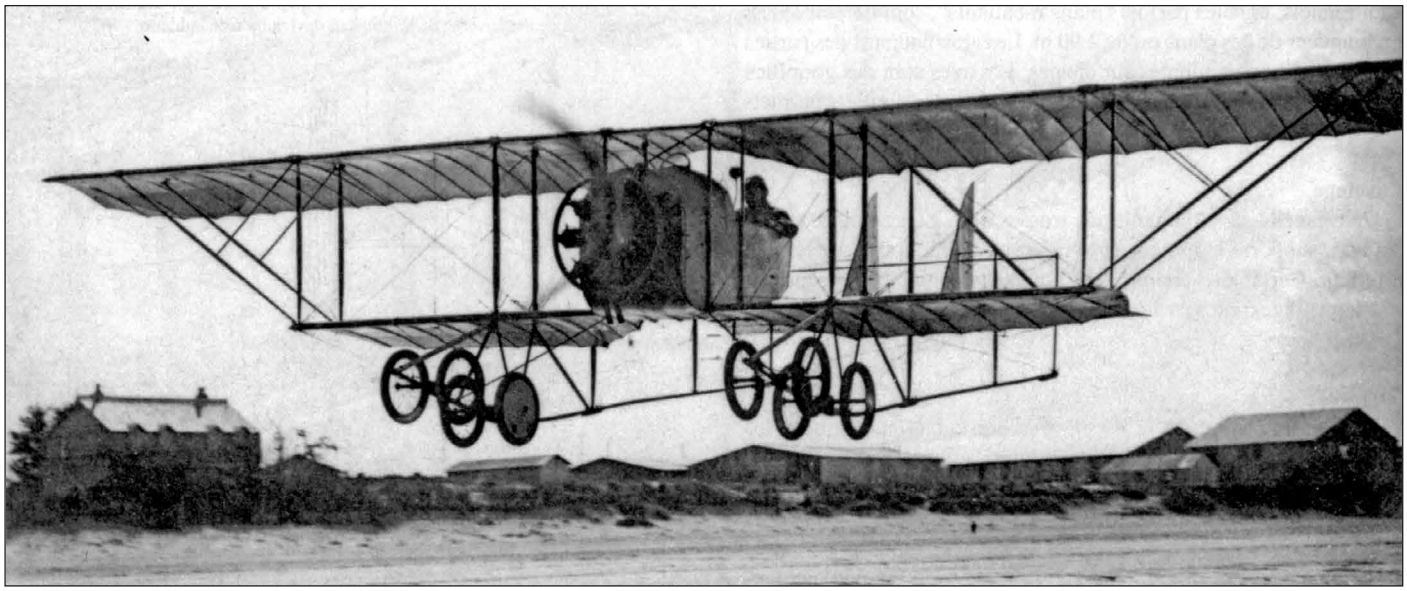
A new, second Anglo-Iraqi Treaty was signed in 1930, and this remained in force even after the British granted the Kingdom of Iraq official independence in 1932. Under its terms, British advisors continued to wield considerable influence over the Iraqi government. Furthermore, British imperial military bases remained in the country, while Iraq had promised to assist the British Empire in time of war as part of the new treaty. Although the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty was not the only reason why there were increasing political tensions in Iraq, it remained a significant factor, not least within Iraq's military forces. Meanwhile, Iraqi politicians were split between those regarded as being pro-British, such as Nuri al-Sa'id, and those considered anti-British, such as Rashid Ali al-Gaylani (al-Kaylani). As evidence of trouble to come, sentiment in the armed forces – including the newly formed Royal Iraqi Air Force (see Chapter Six) – remained heavily weighted against what was widely perceived as a continuing and barely disguised British occupation of their country.

On a more positive note, in February 1933, Iraq Airwork Ltd purchased a three-engined Spartan Cruiser 2. The second of this type to be built in the Isle of Wight in England, it now swapped its original British registration (G-ACBM) for the first Iraqi civil aircraft registration to be issued, YI-AAA. The Spartan Cruiser was capable of carrying five or more passengers, plus the pilot, being designed for comfort and relatively high speed. The Spartan Company hoped that it would be the first of a fleet of such Iraqi airliners, and for a while YI-AAA was used on an experimental route between Baghdad and Mosul. However, no more were purchased and YI-AAA was eventually returned to the UK in June 1934, where it reverted to its original British registration.

In mid-December 1933, King Ghazi I, the new ruler of Iraq, officially opened Iraq's new Baghdad West aerodrome, which was to be the country's main civil airport. Its new terminal had been completed back in the spring of 1933, but the opening was probably delayed by the sudden and unexpected death of King Faisal I. An opening ceremony was also not helped by a dust storm. Nevertheless, the Iraqi monarch happily proclaimed that he knew that flying had come of age because the opening of Baghdad West Airport felt just like opening a new railway station.



Prince Amr Ibrahim, a member of the Egyptian royal family, with Edmond de Laet, chief instructor at the Caudron Flying School in Le Crotoy in 1921. The Caudron G.3 aircraft has additional trainer wheels, the ex-French military serial number 4805 and is powered by a Anzani radial engine. (Musée Caudron photograph)



An Anzani powered Caudron G.3 with additional trainer wheels flying low over the Caudron Flying School "beach landing-ground" at Le Crotoy. (Musée Caudron photograph)

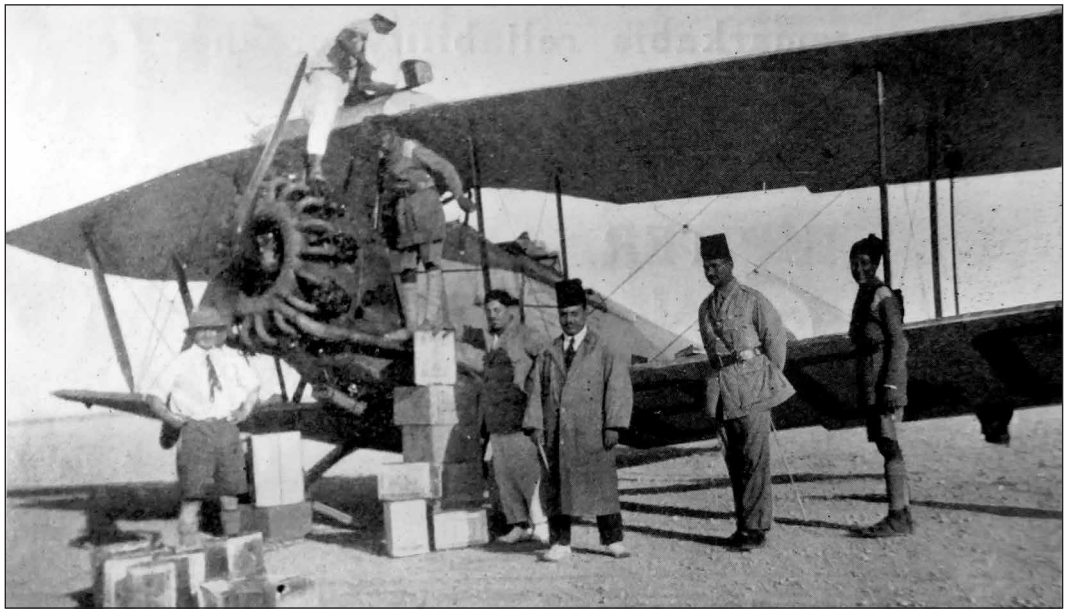
CULTURAL CONDITIONS

Cairo had long been the cultural centre of the Arab world, though always rivalled by Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut and occasionally Tunis and Fez. In 1919, renowned Egyptian poet Ahmad Shawki returned from his wartime exile in Spain. The following year, the British also allowed the return of Prince Abbas Halim, who had fought and reportedly also flown for Germany and the Ottoman Empire during the Great War (see Volume Two).

Over the next few years, Abbas Halim restored his family contacts within Egyptian royal society, especially with Prince Isma'il Da'ud, a rising figure in the Egyptian Army who took Abbas Halim big game hunting in eastern Sudan or Eritrea. They also hunted in Iraq and Somalia, during which time Abbas Halim met the Duke and Duchess of York. According to the Egyptian Prince's recollections, the Duke of York – the future British King George VI – did not like hunting, but the Duchess of York – the future Queen Mother – was enthusiastic and a fine shot. Such connections were greatly prized amongst the higher echelons of Egyptian society, although King Fu'ad refused to allow anyone outside his own immediate family to have the rank of Royal Highness after he himself had been raised from the status of sultan to king.

Hence, Abbas Halim and his family, like so many other direct descendants of Muhammad Ali, the founder of the Egyptian royal family, were downgraded to the rank of *Nabil* ('noble' male) or *Nabilah* ('noble' female). In addition to marrying the divorced daughter of the governor of Alexandria, Abbas Halim continued his interest in flying as well as driving fast cars. This was not simply a personal hobby, as he also sponsored flying and gliding within Egypt, encouraging what was then known as 'air mindedness' amongst his countrymen.

The Caudron Flying School at Le Crotoy was located right next to the Baie de Somme in northern France, with aeroplanes operating from the beach when the tide was out. (Musée Caudron photograph)



One of the prototype Bristol Type 84 Bloodhounds (civil registration G-EBGG) being refuelled with the help of the Egyptian Army or Frontier Force at Marsa Matruh, during a high speed flight from London to Cairo to test the reliability of its Jupiter VI engine early in 1926. (Egyptian Army Museum archive)

Amongst those younger members of the Egyptian royal family who were not demoted by King Fu'ad was a young man who also had a deep interest in aviation. He was Prince Amr Muhammad Wahid al-Din Ibrahim (usually known simply as Amr Ibrahim), a grandson of Muhammad Ali's eldest son and himself son of Prince Muhammad Wahid al-Din Ibrahim and Princess Saliha Ibrahim Isma'il. Born in 1903, he was about six years younger than his cousin Abbas Halim. Furthermore, his father had died in 1906, which meant that by his 18th birthday in 1921, Amr Ibrahim was one of the wealthiest young men in Egypt.

In the early summer of 1921, Prince Amr Ibrahim arrived at the Caudron Brothers Flying School at Le Crotoy, at the mouth of the River Somme in northern France. This school operated land planes from the beach of the Baie de Somme when the tide was out. By 1926, it also offered instruction in maritime aeroplanes, which may also have been the case in 1921. Amr Ibrahim now hired a whole floor of the seafront Hotel de la Marine, reportedly purchased all the oil lamps

Short 184 (number N2812) at the RAF (ex-RNAS) seaplane station at Port Said on 13 November 1918. This station would soon be scaled back, but in the meantime the RAF employed the same "ground handlers" as had served there during the Great War. (Eliot Millar King album, Puke Ariki Collection via C & C International)

Staff, students and a de Havilland DH.60 Moth of the Misr Airwork Flying School at Almaza early in 1933. In the centre, wearing white summer uniforms and red fezes are (from the left) E.G. Parsons an assistant instructor, A.D. Carroll the chief instructor, and Kashif Effendi, another assistant instructor. (Ahmad Isma'il collection)

available in Le Crotoy, and on 11 July 1921, donated 1,000 francs to the poor of the town.

The cost of tuition at the Caudron Flying School is not known for 1921, but in 1926 it stood at 8,000 francs for the first level and 17,500 francs for a second or advanced level, these figures apparently including insurance to cover damage. Also included in the tuition fees were tests to obtain a pilot's brevet, conducted by examiners of the Aéro Club de France (ACF) and, if the student passed, a brevet supplied by the Aéro Club de France via the school. This was followed by further documentation from the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale (FAI), which was why two different dates are sometimes listed in a pupil's records. By 1926, the staff of the Caudron Flying School consisted of the director and chief flying instructor, four other pilot instructors, one technical instructor and 30 mechanics. At that date, the school had between 40 and 50 aeroplanes, of which Caudron G.3s with 80 or 90hp engines were the basic instruction machines. They were still in use in 1926, along with twin-engined Caudron G.4s and more modern aeroplanes, including five seaplanes or flying boats.

Prince Amr Ibrahim was photographed next to one of the Caudron G.3s with Edmond de Laet, the school's chief instructor. This machine, number 4805, had left the Caudron factory on 26 June 1919 and would later be given the French civil registration F-AHCI while assigned to the '*Maison Caudron*'. Another photograph from this time showed Caudron G.3 number 5547 (or possibly 3347), which did not have military markings. Here, the flying students who surrounded Edmond de Laet not only included Prince Amr Ibrahim, but also Bessie Coleman, the first black American female pilot to obtain her brevet, number 18,310, received on 15 June 1921 after learning to fly at Le Crotoy. Prince Amr Ibrahim's brevet, number 18,455, was dated 18 October and 30 September 1921, perhaps being when he received his ACF and FAI certificates. The prince and the famous Bessie Coleman were therefore almost certainly training around the same time.

Not that Prince Amr Ibrahim was only thinking about his flying in 1921. That year, he had a lavish palace built at Zamalik on Gezira Island in Cairo. It cost a fortune and would be his summer residence. Still known as the Palace of Prince Amr Ibrahim, it is now used as an arts centre and ceramics museum, Prince Amr Ibrahim having been forced into exile after the Egyptian Revolution of 1952. After serving as a senior commander of Egypt's Special Police during the Second World War, and still enjoying support in certain sections of the armed forces, it was Amr Ibrahim's political influence rather than his role in the development of Egyptian aviation which rendered him *persona non grata* to the new regime.

On 9 November 1935, *Nabil* Abbas Halim personally welcomed the famous French pilot and writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry to Almaza airport, apparently during preparations for Saint-Exupéry's attempt to break the speed record between Paris and Saigon. This effort nearly ended in disaster when Saint-Exupéry and his mechanic-navigator, André Prevot, crashed near the Wadi Natrun, west of the Nile Delta, on 30 December 1935. Both men almost died of dehydration before they were found and saved by a local Egyptian Bedouin. This brush with death was later described in Saint-Exupéry's memoir, *Wind, Sand and Stars* (published in 1939), while his world-famous children's book, *The Little Prince* (1943), also starts with a pilot finding himself marooned in the desert.

2
THE POST-WAR YEARS IN OTHER ARAB TERRITORIES

Outside Egypt and Iraq, the most important local powers were the emerging Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the rising force of settler Zionism in Palestine. Other players, such as the independent Imamate of Yemen, the Sanussi movement in what is now Libya and various 'anti-imperialist' groups in Morocco and elsewhere, were rarely of more than local significance.

On 8 March 1920, the Hashemite Kingdom of Syria was proclaimed in Damascus by the Syrian National Congress, itself an assembly of local and regional leaders and representative. This self-declared state controlled much of the semi-desert and desert areas in the east of what are now Syria and Jordan. It also had a significant army, largely consisting of the old Northern Arab Army of the Arab Revolt which had fought against the Ottoman Empire with both British and French military assistance during the First World War. Many of its troops were themselves Arab veterans of the Ottoman Army who had transferred their allegiance to the Hashemite-led Arab Revolt during the conflict, and they included well trained officers. Amongst those officers who now found themselves in Damascus, and who proudly received the Syrian Independence Day Medal, was a 24-year-old who had been born in Baghdad. His name was Mahmud Salman al-Janabi, who had graduated from the Ottoman Military College in Constantinople in 1916. Commissioned as a *Mulazim Thani* (second lieutenant) on 4 July that year, Mahmud Salman al-Janabi subsequently defected to the Army of the Arab Revolt, after which he was destined to play a significant, though ultimately tragic, role in the history of the Iraqi Air Force (see Chapter Six and Volume Five).

The Syrian National Congress had proclaimed Faisal ruler of the country "in its natural boundaries", which were stated to extend from the Taurus Mountains of Turkey to the Sinai desert

Sidi Salih al-Baskari (left), the Sanussi *Qa'im-Maqam* or military governor of al-Kufra in south-eastern Libya, with the commander of regular Sanussi troops in this region (right) around 1920. (Egyptian Geographical Society)

A Tuareg warrior in the Tibesti region, in the deep south of Libya between 1919 and 1921. (Egyptian Geographical Society)

Sanussi regular troops near al-Awjila, south of Cyrenaica around 1920. The man standing on the far left is almost certainly an ex-member of the Egyptian Coastguard Camel Corps, probably one of those who deserted to the Sanussi during the First World War. (Egyptian Geographical Society)

General Ömer Fahrettin Pasha, the Ottoman Commanding Officer of the Madina garrison, held out against the Hashemite Arab Revolt with its British, French and Egyptian advisors throughout the Great War. Only on 9 January 1919, after being arrested by his own men, did Fahrettin Pasha finally surrender the city to Amir Abdullah Ibn Husayn at Bir Darwish. (Martyrs Memorial Museum Amman)

A Palestinian Arab recruit to the Hashemite Arab Army Camel Corps in Jerusalem in 1918 or 1919. He still wears his previous Ottoman uniform and appears to be of interest to a passing Zionist settler. (Martyrs' Memorial Museum, Amman)

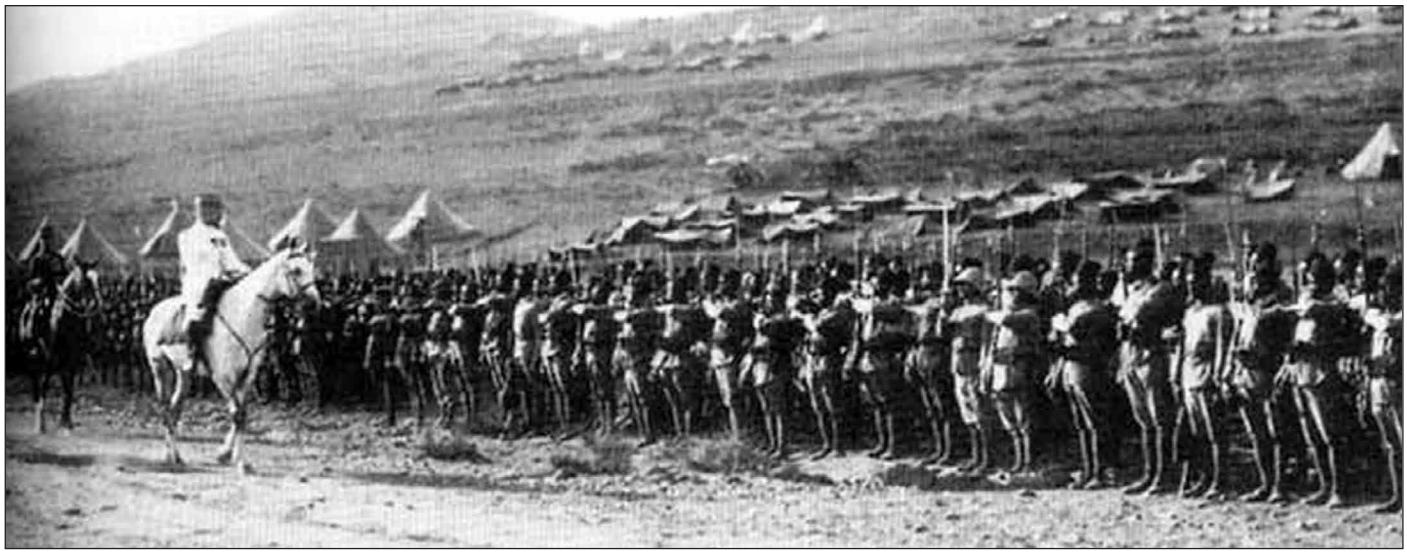
Captain Isma'il Abdu with regular troops of the Hashemite Army Camel Corps in northern Syria, shortly after the end of the First World War. (Martyrs' Memorial Museum, Amman)

in Egypt. In fact, this new kingdom only lasted a few months. On 24 July 1920, there was a battle between Faisal's Hashemite Arab troops under General Yusuf al-Azma, supported by local volunteers, and the French Army of the Levant under General Henri Gouraud. It took place in the Maysalun Pass, some 25km west of Damascus. Al-Azma was killed, while the much better equipped and organised French forces won a relatively easy victory before occupying Damascus the following day.

King Faisal was obliged to flee and the French gradually took control of Syria as well as Lebanon, which they already controlled. The result was the mandated territory which France had agreed with its allies at the San Remo Conference in 1920. This position would be formalised by a League of Nations mandate on 29 September 1923, which in turn lasted until 1946. One of the perhaps unexpected result of the Battle of Maysalun Pass was that many people within the British imperial establishment now claimed to respect Syrian nationalists because they had fought for their freedom, albeit unsuccessfully. In contrast, these same people attempted to justify their lack of respect for Egyptian nationalists on the grounds that the latter had supposedly never fought.

The story that General Gouraud went to the Tomb of Saladin after entering Damascus, kicked the Sultan's grave and announced, "Saladin, we have returned" – a reference to the expulsion of the Crusaders at the end of the 13th century – was probably a myth. Nevertheless, this rumour rapidly spread across the region and would could cost the French dear.

The French authorities now divided their mandated territory into six nominally autonomous regions: Aleppo in the north,



French General Henri Gouraud inspecting French colonial troops at Maysalun either just before or shortly after the battle of Maysalun. (Military Museum, Damascus)

King Faisal, briefly the ruler of Syria from 8 March to 24 July 1920, with Yusuf al-Azma, Minister of War and Chief of the General Staff of the Kingdom of Syria, shortly before the Battle of Maysalun Pass. Yusuf al-Azma was killed during this battle on 24 July 1920. (Military Museum, Damascus)

north-east and north-west; Damascus in the centre, south and east; Lebanon in the south-west; and smaller areas for the Alawis in the north-western coastal mountain and the Druze in the deep south. The first serious opposition to French domination would arise in the latter area, in the Jabal Druze hills where nationalist agitation against French rule, led by Sultan al-Atrash, resulted in the Druze Revolt of 1925. This uprising then spread rapidly across most of Syria and into parts of generally pro-French Lebanon, before being defeated after ferocious fighting during the following year. Sultan al-Atrash fled with his most loyal followers to British-ruled Transjordan, only returning to Syria in 1937 after being pardoned by the French. Here, al-Atrash was greeted by enthusiastic crowds; he continues to be regarded as a founding father of the Syrian independence struggle to this day.

Within Syria, meanwhile, other nationalists had followed a less militant path and, following elections in 1928, a Syrian constituent assembly drafted a new constitution for the country. Unfortunately, this was rejected by the resident French High Commissioner, leading to further protests and some localised violence. Despite – or perhaps because of – this opposition, the French government would negotiate a Treaty of Independence with Syrian-elected leaders led by Hashim al-Atassi in September 1936. This treaty had much in common with the agreements which the British had reached, or would soon reach, with leaders of their mandated territories. Thus, France agreed to Syrian independence while maintaining its own economic and military domination over the country.

Hashim al-Atassi himself was already a respected Syrian nationalist, having earlier been governor of various Ottoman districts before being elected as Chairman of the Syrian National Congress in 1920. During Faisal's brief reign as King of Syria, Hashim al-Atassi served as prime minister, working hard though in vain to win foreign support against the imposition of a French mandate. Subsequently, he made himself a thorn in the side of the French mandatory authorities as founder of the National Bloc, which dominated Syrian political attempts to achieve independence. Success appeared to arrive in 1936, with the French agreeing that, over time, all the autonomous regions of mandated Syria would be incorporated into a new, independent Syrian state. In return, the Syrian government promised to support France in time of war, offering the use of its air space to French aircraft, and allowed France to maintain military bases in the country. Hashim al-Atassi therefore returned home in triumph on 27 September 1936 and was elected as Syria's first president the following November. Unfortunately, the French Legislature or parliament

in Paris refused to ratify this agreement, which remained a dead letter until the outbreak of the Second World War focussed attention elsewhere.

One of the main difficulties with the Franco-Syrian Treaty of Independence was that the majority of the Christian population of Lebanon did not want to become part of an otherwise overwhelmingly Muslim Syria. Furthermore, they had considerable support for this position inside the French government and parliament. Present-day Lebanon, whose frontiers were defined during the period of the French mandate, includes considerably more than the old Ottoman *wilayat* of Lebanon, often itself known as 'Mount Lebanon'. Following the First World War, French motives for greatly expanding what it termed Lebanon were mixed. They were, however, based upon knowledge that the Christian Lebanese had a deep attachment to France, and to what is now called 'the West'.

The signing of the Treaty between the Kingdom of Iraq and Ibn Sa'ud of Najd in 1930. (Albert Grandolini collection)

In the belief that a Lebanese state would remain attached to France economically, culturally and perhaps even militarily, the French authorities decided that this new political entity not only needed more defensible frontiers and be large enough for defence in depth, but must also be economically viable. Furthermore, there was an overt desire to use an enlarged Lebanon as a means of containing a potentially less-friendly and overwhelmingly Muslim Syria. So, the Lebanese frontier was pushed eastward, from the foothills of Mount Lebanon or the main Lebanon Range to the crest of the lower but still formidable Anti-Lebanon Range, and south to the border of British-mandated Palestine.

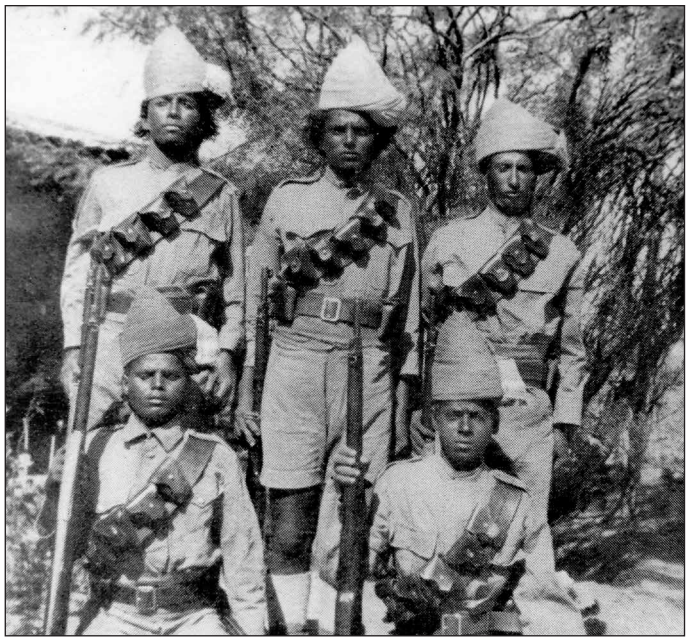
Thus, the new state incorporated the fertile, largely Muslim and Druze, Beqa'a valley and its main town of Baalbek. This area was, however, culturally and historically much closer to Damascus than to the Lebanese capital of Beirut on the other side of Mount Lebanon. As a consequence, while the Ottoman *wilayat* of Lebanon had been overwhelmingly Christian in population, the new Lebanese state included Sunni and Shi'a Muslims and Druze, plus assorted smaller minorities. At the time of the country's creation and subsequent independence, Lebanon's population was roughly half Christian and half 'others'. So sensitive were these proportions that there has been determined resistance to conducting a nationwide census after that of 1932, for fear of rocking the boat and upsetting the unwritten National Pact of 1943, which thereafter remained central to Lebanon's political system.

A new Lebanese Constitution was drawn up in 1926, and while this enshrined the rights of all religious groups, it was designed to guarantee Christian political dominance; the Christians, of course, being France's firmest allies. The country's president would also be a Christian. In practice, he was always a member of the Maronite Church, which was in communion with the Roman Catholic Church while retaining certain differences in religious practice. Yet this was not written into the constitution. Meanwhile, the prime minister would be a Sunni Muslim. Other confessional groups were traditionally allocated other political or military posts. Following the census undertaken in 1932, parliamentary seats were divided between Christians and Muslims (including the not strictly Muslim Druze community) on a six-to-five ratio in favour of the former. The Lebanese Constitution also gave the country's Christian president a veto over parliamentary legislation, which effectively meant that this ratio could not be altered even if the relative sizes of various religious groups changed over time. Though not entirely democratic, this singular Lebanese method of government worked remarkably well for many decades.

It was within the Arabian Peninsula that the most dramatic changes in fortune occurred during the decade following the end of the Great War. They resulted in the unification of the greater part of this land under the House of Sa'ud (see Chapter Four). Abd al-Aziz Ibn Sa'ud, with his fundamentalist Wahabi and tribal warriors, had seized control of Riyadh in the Najd area of central Arabia back in 1902. From this base, Ibn Sau'd expanded the territory under his control, largely by military means, taking over the rest of Najd as well as al-Hasa on the Persian Gulf coast by 1912. As the *Amir* of Najd and al-Hasa, he then created the *Ikhwan*, or 'Brotherhood', a religious–military association comparable to that of the Sanussi in Libya. This highly motivated and disciplined force played a major role in subsequent Sa'udi conquests, but would also become powerful enough to threaten the Sa'udi leadership.

Abd al-Aziz Ibn Sa'ud had acknowledged Ottoman overlordship in 1914, and thereafter played no significant part in the Arab Revolt. On the contrary, he directed his followers against the Sa'udi family's traditional rivals, the Banu Shammar tribal confederation of northern Arabia under the Rashid (al-Rashid) family, who were more clearly loyal to the Ottoman cause.

In the summer of 1918, Ibn Sa'ud's *Ikhwan* army invaded Shammar territory, but was unable to take its rivals' main centre at al-Ha'il. By the time the Great War ended in November that year, relations between Ibn Sa'ud and the Sharif Husayn Ibn Ali al-Hashemi of Mecca were near breaking point. The first major clash came at Turabah on 25-26 May 1919, where the *Ikhwan* were again victorious. Though few outside observers realised it at the time, the future of Arabia lay with Ibn Sa'ud and his family, not with



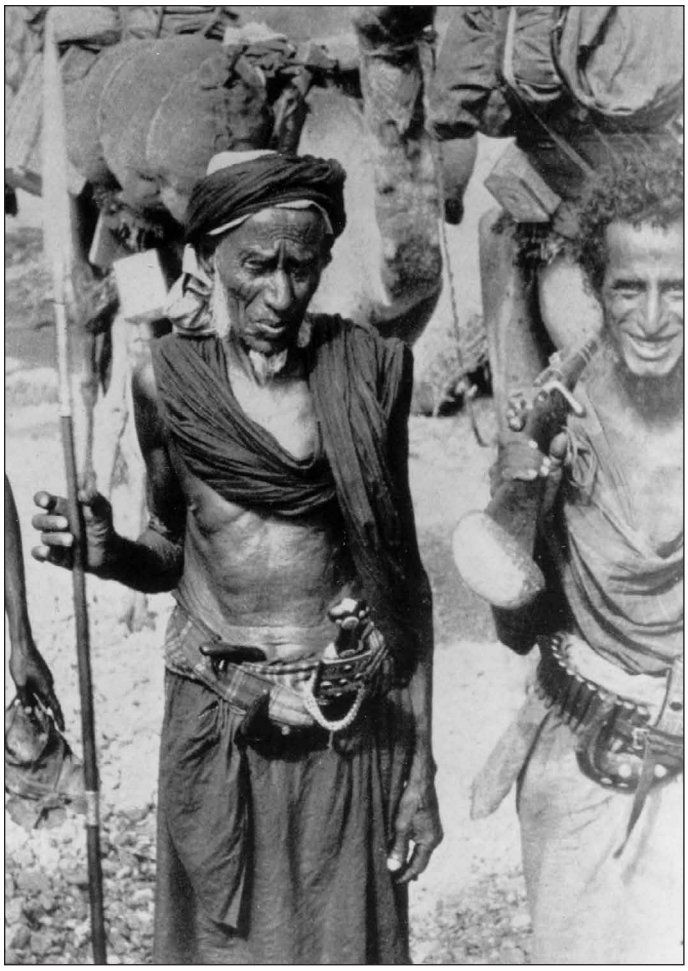
New recruits to the 1st Yemen Infantry, in the British Aden Protectorate in 1919. This formation was soon disbanded, but a few years later many of the same men joined the Aden Protectorate Levies, a local force under RAF command. (Author's collection)

the Hashemite family and the Sharifian Arab Army, which had fought so hard against the Ottoman Empire since the outbreak of the Arab Revolt in 1916.

The following year, Ibn Sa'ud's *Ikhwan* conquered the province of Asir, which lay between Yemen and the Hijaz. In 1921, Ibn Sa'ud also took control of northern Arabia, crushing what remained of the authority of the al-Rashid family and the Shammar confederation; Shammar territory already being divided between Arabia and British-controlled Iraq. The stage was now set for a final confrontation between the Amirate of Najd and Hasa under Abd al-Aziz Ibn Sa'ud and the Hashemite Kingdom of Hijaz under the Sharif Husayn (see Chapter Four). The British, who had traditionally supported the Hashemites, were initially alarmed by the rise of Ibn Sau'd, though when the crunch came, the British Empire adopted a coldly practical approach to this struggle for power, especially as the Americans were also now taking an interest in the area.

Others in the Arabian Peninsula watched developments with interest and sometimes alarm. In Yemen, the Imam Yahya al-Mutawakkil took the opportunity provided by the evacuation of Ottoman troops at the end of the Great War to expand territory under his control. Imam Yahya also hoped to recreate a unified 'Greater Yemen' that would include not only Aden and the neighbouring British Protectorate, but also Asir to the north. He even had his eyes on Dhufar, far to the east (now part of the Sultanate of Oman). Such ambitions inevitably led to clashes between the Imam's forces and other local leaders, including the Idrisid ruler of Asir, Ibn Sa'ud of Najd and of course the British. Sayyid Idrisi of Asir may have been particularly worried as the British ended their subsidies to his government in June 1919, though a limited supply of British weaponry continued. Imam Yahya similarly refused to accept the existing frontier between what had become his territory in Yemen and the Aden Protectorate because the line had been drawn by outsiders, namely the Ottoman and British Empires.

Late in 1918, the British temporarily occupied the Yemeni Red Sea port of Hudaydah to facilitate the repatriation of Ottoman troops, and by the following February most of the latter had departed. During 1919, the Imam Yahya Muhammad Hamid al-



Tribal warriors in the Aden Protectorate immediately after the First World War. Although some had old rifles, many were still armed with traditional spears, swords and daggers, as were tribesmen on the Yemeni side of the frontier. (Author's collection)

Din sent troops across the ill-defined border, to which the British responded by reoccupying Hudaydah, which they then handed over to the Idrisid ruler of Asir. Yemeni Imamate troops would invade the Protectorate again three years later, to which the British responded with airpower in a pattern that was repeated several times during the 1920s (see Volume Three). This, and the rising threat from the Sa'udis, would in turn encourage Imam Yahya to try and establish a Yemeni Air Force (see Chapter Five).

On the western side of the Red Sea, south of Egypt, lay the vast territory of the Sudan. It was theoretically still an Anglo-Egyptian condominium, though after the disturbances of the 1920s and the forced withdrawal of Egyptian forces from the country, the Sudan was effectively under British control alone. It also formed an increasingly important air corridor between nominally independent Egypt and the British imperial colonies in eastern and southern Africa. In April 1933, Fraulein Elly Beinhorn, one of Germany's leading 'aviatrix' women pilots, had refuelled at Almaza on the edge of Cairo, having flown in from Berlin via Turkey and Syria. She was already a celebrated and indeed highly popular female pilot. After returning to Germany in July 1932 from an epic round-the-world flight in a little Klemm Kl 26, Elly Beinhorn had been awarded that year's Hindenburg Trophy. This was awarded annually for the most outstanding aeronautical achievement of the year, though the 1933 prize was shared between Beinhorn for powered flight and Wolf Hirth for unpowered flight, gliding or soaring.

The renowned German aviatrix Elly Beinhorn in 1932, the year that she was a joint recipient of the Hindenburg Trophy, and her Heinkel He 71 B which she flew the length of the Sudan during her flight around Africa in 1933. (Author's collection)

Now Elly Beinhorn was attempting to fly around the continent of Africa in a Heinkel 71, registration D 2390. Her aeroplane had been specially modified by Ernst Heinkel, with an 80hp Hirth engine, an enclosed cockpit and long-range fuel tanks. Fraulein Elly set off from Berlin on 4 April 1933, flying via Constantinople and Aleppo to Cairo, where the now-famous Egyptian pilot Muhammad Sidqi (see Chapter Seven; n.b., the name Sidqi often appears as Sidki, and was a matter of personal choice) invited her to his home. Here, according to a report in a German newspaper, Sidqi's wife, Franziska, gave Elly tea while Elly asked Muhammad's advice about the next stage of her flight along the Nile to the Sudan.

Upon reaching the Sudanese capital of Khartoum, Beinhorn found herself facing formidable administrative hurdles from the British imperial authorities. For example, they insisted that a woman could not fly alone over the Sudan but must have male escorts. Feeling somewhat insulted, but also amused, Elly had no choice but to accept two Englishmen, whose aeroplane would 'protect' her. Together they took off, but the men soon had to make an emergency landing. The German aviatrix checked that they were in no danger; they had actually suffered no damage apart from a burst type. Fraulein Beinhorn flew on alone – against the rules. As an unaccompanied woman, she was again not allowed to fly back to the two Englishmen to bring them the necessary spares. However, after continuing to press her case, she was eventually allowed by the British authorities to complete her flight as planned, via Nairobi and Johannesburg to Cape Town. After a rest, this formidable aviatrix flew back up the west coast of Africa and thence to Germany. In total, Elly Beinhorn covered about 28,000km.

In the easternmost corner of the Arabian Peninsula, the coastal ports of what is now the Sultanate of Oman had been the object of rivalry between various European imperial powers for centuries; a rivalry which had formed part of a wider struggle for domination of the Indian Ocean and India. During this period, the Omanis had established their own remarkable maritime 'empire' on the coast of eastern Africa. During the 19th century, what was then generally known as the Sultanate of Muscat (the coastal area) and Oman (the interior) concluded several treaties of friendship and commerce with the British, resulting in an 'agreement of friendship' in 1908. However, the United Kingdom and its Empire did not yet recognise the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman as a fully independent state. Instead, there was a somewhat ill-defined British protectorate over the area.

A strand of Islam called the *Ibadiyya* or *Ibadi* movement, which was in certain respects distinct from both the Sunni and Shi'a forms, had long been dominant in Oman. The spiritual leader or Imam of Omani Ibadism was based in the fortified inland town of Nizwa. During the early 20th century, longstanding tension between the Sultan of Muscat on the coast and the Ibadi Imam based in Nizwa continued and, in 1913, had resulted in authority being divided between the two. Not until 25 September 1920 was the country temporarily reunited by the Treaty of al-Sib, which had been brokered by the British. This agreement recognised the Imam as ruler of much of the interior of Oman, though under the overall suzerainty of the Sultan of Muscat, who continued to dominate the coast while also being responsible for external affairs.

The current Sultan of Muscat was Taimur Ibn Faisal, who had reigned over Muscat, its surrounding and almost all of the coast since 1886. For the British, the Treaty of al-Sib was seen as a happy outcome because it allowed the Royal Navy to use Omani ports and, when the time came, for the RAF to establish staging posts as part of Britain's expanding network of imperial air routes. Twelve years later, Sultan Taimur Ibn Faisal abdicated in favour of his son Sa'id, Taimur eventually dying in exile in India in 1965.

Far to the west, in Morocco, there were many reasons behind the creation of the fiercely separate, independent Rifian Republic in the almost inaccessible Rif Mountains. This state was formally declared on 18 September 1921 and soon caught the attention, sympathy and even limited support of liberal-minded, anti-colonial, anti-imperialist or simply romantically inclined European and American observers. The Rif Republic would eventually be crushed by French and Spanish forces in May 1926 (see Volume Three), but a little over eight years later, a group of nationalists in the Comité d'Action Marocaine (CAM) put forward a reform programme which many outsiders regarded as both reasonable and realistic. Even so, it would take time, pressure and patience for Morocco to regain real independence as a kingdom rather than a mere sultanate. This would be achieved in a relatively peaceful manner – in stark contrast to the horrors of the Algerian War of Independence, which engulfed Morocco's eastern neighbour following the Second World War.

MILITARY MATTERS

The unexpected survival of some elements of what had been the Ottoman air services in the new Republic of Turkey may have been a further inspiration to those in the Arab world who longed to create air forces of their own. As with the Ottoman Navy, which was supposed to disappear entirely, and with the Ottoman Army, which was supposed to be reduced to a tiny gendarmerie, the orders of the victorious Allies were not fully carried out. The sheer size of Turkey and the chaos which reigned in many areas enabled the Turks to bureaucratically 'lose' a considerable amount of military equipment.

Nevertheless, only 40 trained men, including pilots, mechanics and administrators, were available when the Turkish War of Independence started in 1919. A handful of aircraft were then reassembled, some from scrap and others from different versions of one type. From this tiny force, the modern Turkish Air Force soon emerged. The first aircraft of the new Republican Turkish Air Force was an Albatros D III, which in 1920 was flown secretly to Eskişehir, where it was operated by some of Kemal Ataturk's supporters (so-called 'revolutionaries'). They included Ahmet Ali Arap, the black pilot who was reportedly the unit's first commanding officer. The creation of an Iranian air force would be a further stimulus for the Arabs to do the same, especially in neighbouring and traditionally rival Iraq (see Volume Three).

Immediately south of Turkey, the French soon raised local military units within their mandated territories, in what became Syria and Lebanon. The first formed an integral part of the French 'Army of the Levant', which had been established before the end of the First World War. Of these, the most significant would be the Troupes Speciales du Levant, created shortly after the war in 1919 but before the French mandate was officially established. Eventually, the 8,000 men of this force evolved into the armies of both independent countries. Initially, however, the Troupes Speciales were employed as auxiliaries in support of ordinary French units. Their senior officers were French regular soldiers, though after a while, Syrians were permitted to hold commissions. However, they only did so up to the rank of Capitaine, which was the most senior rank of the French system of Officiers Subalterns or junior officers.

Thereafter, officers of Lebanese or Syrian origin steadily increased in number until, by the end of the Second World War, they represented about nine-tenths of commissioned officers in the Troupes Speciales. Meanwhile, the story of the Lebanese units diverged from that of the Syrian ones, largely because they were favoured by the French authorities, who regarded Lebanese as fundamentally more loyal to France than Syrians. It could even be claimed that the history of the modern Lebanese Army can be traced back as far as 1916, when France established its Légion d'Orient, later called the Légion Armenienne, which included men from Lebanon at an early date. However, it is the Francs-tireurs Libanais, or 'Lebanese Sharp Shooters', created in 1926 and drawing men from the Troupes Speciales du Levant, who are normally seen as the direct ancestor of today's Lebanese armed forces.

The first local force raised by the British in Palestine and Transjordan, as distinct from the units of the Hashemite Arab Army which found themselves in what became Transjordan at the end of the First World War, were allies of the British, not subordinate auxiliaries of the British Army. The first indigenous local unit raised by the British occupation administration in Palestine, which then formed part of OETA (Occupied Enemy Territory Administration) South, was the Palestine Police. This existed for several years alongside the ex-Ottoman, paramilitary Palestine Gendarmerie. The new police force was founded at the same time as the British civilian administration of the mandate, during the summer of 1920. Its headquarters in Jerusalem was in an area known as the Russian Compound, from where its British leadership – headed by Lieutenant Colonel Bramley – was assisted by British Military Police. Consisting of over 1,000 local men and more than 50 local Arab officers, plus 18 British officers, the Palestine Police gradually grew into an effective and quite formidable military unit, whose duties went beyond simply the preservation of law and order.

In 1926, the old ex-Ottoman Gendarmerie was finally disbanded, the majority of its personnel entering either the Palestine Police or the more recently established Transjordan Frontier Force. By the end of the 1920s, the Palestine Police Force had almost doubled in size, and although in 1928 the great majority of its men were Muslim Arabs, there were also 471 Christian Arabs, 321 Jews and a substantial number of men from the United Kingdom.

While the army of today's Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan traces its origins back to the Hashemite Arab Army of the Great Arab Revolt, its genesis also goes back to a much smaller unit established by the British in Transjordan on 22 October 1920. This was the 150-strong Mobile Force led by Captain F.G. Peake, who had previously commanded a company of the Egyptian Army Camel Corps during the First World War (see Volume Two). Known affectionately as Peake Pasha, this highly experienced British officer oversaw the expansion of an elite force which, by the autumn of 1923, had reached 1,000 men and would be renamed the Arab Legion.

Military organisation in French North African again differed between Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, all of which differed from the French mandate in Syria and Lebanon. The ex-Ottoman Beylik of Tunisia had been a French protectorate since 1881. Thereafter, substantial numbers of Tunisian men had been recruited into the French Army as both infantry and cavalry. Like other French North African units, they served with distinction during the First World War, and would do the same during the Second World War. Meanwhile, the only strictly Tunisian military force then in existence was the Beylical Guard, whose largely ceremonial role was to protect the Bey, the nominal ruler of Tunisia. This unit, however, took pride in being descended from the modern or reformed army created by the Bey or governor of a nominally Ottoman Tunisia in the 1830s, in imitation of comparable reformed 'new armies' raised within the main part of the Ottoman Empire and in autonomous Egypt.

Being governed as an integral part of the French state, Algeria had no military forces of its own. Units raised in Algeria were simply part of the French Army. In contrast, Morocco, as a recognised and separate state – though divided between French and Spanish protectorates – did have its own soldiers. Because the nominal ruler of Morocco claimed direct descent from the Prophet Muhammad, his personal guard formation was officially called the Cherifian (Sharifian) Guard. Unofficially, it was often also known as the Black Guard because its members were traditionally recruited from the dark-skinned Haratins. The latter were a settled rather than nomadic community whose origins are believed to have been south of the Sahara. Haratins still inhabit many of the oases of southern Morocco, Mauretania, the Western Sahara, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya.

At the same time, large numbers of Moroccans, both Berber and Arab, were recruited as Spahi cavalry and Tirailleur infantry in the French Armée d'Afrique (Army of Africa) to serve alongside Algerians, Tunisians and others. Popularly known as goumières or indigenes, these Berber and Arab soldiers earned a fearsome reputation in both world wars.

The Spanish Army similarly employed Moroccan troops recruited within its protectorate in the north of the country. They would serve against fellow Moroccan in the Rif War of 1921–26, and subsequently on the Nationalist side for General Franco during the Spanish Civil War of 1936–39.

Meanwhile, in many parts of the Arab world, the European imperial, colonial and mandate powers discovered that independent or insurgent Arab troops soon lost their fear of air attack and learned ingenious ways of countering their enemies' technological advantage. This was particularly true of the more sophisticated Arab, Kurdish and other forces which brought down or damaged a surprising number of British, French, Italian and Spanish aeroplanes during the inter-war years.

CULTURAL CONDITIONS

Events in Iraq had an impact upon neighbouring Syria in several ways. For example, when large numbers of the Assyrian Christian population fled from northern Iraq, many moved westward towards the Jazira area of what became the French mandate of Syria. Most of those who settled there did so between the River Euphrates and the still undefined and indeed unagreed frontier with Turkey. Such significant shifts of population inevitably caused tensions with the existing inhabitants, especially as the newcomers were from a different linguistic and religious community. However, it is also true that some of the tensions which erupted did so as a result of French military actions, including the use of aeroplanes, because one of the antagonistic groups were perceived by the other as allies or supporters of the new 'infidel' French rulers.

On other occasions the changes resulted from what seemed to be a peaceful solution to a longstanding problem. For example, it took time for France and Turkey to agree the precise frontier between the newly established Turkish Republic and French mandated Syria. This border was eventually defined by the Franco-Turkish Agreement of Ankara in October 1921, whereupon the greater part of the Assyrian Christian population of the historically important Christian city of Nusaybin (Nisibin) left their homes after it was ceded to Turkey. Most of them settled just across the new frontier in nearby Qamishli. As a result, Nusaybin became largely – though not entirely – Kurdish, while Qamishli remained a largely Syriac (Syriac Catholic and Syriac Orthodox) Christian city. This would remain the case until 1926, when a Kurdish uprising under Sa'id Ali Naqshbandi in Turkey was ruthlessly crushed. This was followed by a substantial migration of Kurds across the border into northern Syria, where they were granted citizenship by the French mandate authorities and soon came to dominate swathes of northern and north-eastern Syria.

There had been huge loss of life in Lebanon during the First World War, mainly due to what was called the Great Famine which had stuck the country during these years. As a result, many in the Christian population feared for the continued existence of their community, based as it was in and around rugged but not particularly fertile Mount Lebanon. This was, in turn, a further reason why so many of the Christian community's political and religious leadership urged that the future state of Lebanon be expanded to include the fertile but largely non-Christian Beqa'a valley to the east, plus the Akkar hills to the north. A further expansion to the south, which brought a substantial Shi'a Muslim population into the future state, seems to have been a tidying-up exercise, incorporating what would otherwise have become an almost isolated enclave between Lebanon and Palestine.

In cultural terms, the most important changes in Palestine between the wars were a consequence of Zionist Jewish settlement. However, this in turn led to a consolidation of what became a specifically Palestinian Arab sense of identity. The term 'Palestine' had earlier been a hazy one, sometimes including Cisjordan west of the River Jordan and Transjordan to the east. By the end of the First World War, however, British administrators tended to reserve the name Palestine for territory west of the Jordan, while referring to the east as Transjordan or Transjordania. Meanwhile, the term 'Palestinian' had traditionally formed part of a person's *nisba* or sequence of adjectives indicating an individual's ancestry, tribal affiliation and/or place of origin. The first reference to the indigenous inhabitants simply as Palestinians, without qualifying them as Palestinian Arabs, seems to have been in a series of formal complaints presented to the British authorities by the Permanent Executive Committee composed of both Muslims and Christians on 26 July 1928.

In December 1921, the British mandate authorities approved the establishment of the Supreme Muslim Council (SMC), whose duties included the administration of Waqf or Muslim religious endowments. The SMC was also responsible for the appointment of religious judges and muftis (men qualified in the interpretation of Islamic Shari'a Law). Distinctly more political and nationalistic was the Arab Higher Committee. This would be established on 25 April 1936 upon the urging of the Grand Mufti Amin al-Husaini and others as the central political expression of the Palestinian Arab community.

For most Muslim Palestinians, their natural leader was the Mufti of Jerusalem, who was custodian of the Islamic holy places in that city. Nevertheless, it was the British military governor, Colonel Sir Ronald Storrs, who created the post of Grand Mufti in 1918 in order to bestow greater prestige on the position of the Mufti of Jerusalem. It had been a relatively minor position during Ottoman times. The latter role had been in the Husaini family for some time and was held by Kamil Ibn Muhammad Tahir al-Husaini from 1918 until his death in 1921. He worked hard to find accommodations with both the British mandate authorities and the Zionists. Indeed, Kamil al-Husaini was honoured by the British, who made him a Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George. In contrast, Kamil al-Husaini's father and predecessor as Jerusalem's Hanafi mufti (there also being other muftis for the other schools of Islamic Law), Muhammad Tahir al-Husaini al-Hanafi, had been an early critic of Zionism and had tried to stop the sale of land to Jewish settlers.

Kamil al-Husaini was succeeded by his brother, Amin al-Husaini, who soon became a controversial figure. Closer to his father's views and approach than those of his brother, Amin al-Husaini was a fearless critic of both Zionism and the British, openly supporting the Palestinian Arab revolt. Indeed, he had to flee the country in 1937 to avoid arrest. Going first to French Mandated Lebanon, then to Iraq, Amin al-Husaini eventually settled in Italy. During the Second World War, he spoke on Fascist and Nazi radio stations, urging opposition to the British and their Allies. He was also accused of helping recruit Bosnian Muslims to serve in Hitler's Waffen–SS.

PART TWO

THE FIRST ARAB AIR FORCES

3

ABD AL-KARIM'S DREAM OF AN AIR FORCE

It is clear that, from the early days of the Rif War, Abd al-Karim's followers were instructed to try to capture intact any Spanish aeroplane which, for whatever reason, was obliged to land in Rifian territory. This also meant that an enemy aircrew must be stopped from setting fire to their machine. On the other side of the fence, Spanish commanders gave equally strict orders to their pilots and observers to prevent aeroplanes from falling intact into enemy hands. In other words, aircraft must be destroyed if there was any chance of the enemy capturing them.

Most of the Spanish aeroplanes which were forced down by enemy fire or mechanical failure during the Rif War either came down within Spanish-held territory or were close enough to Spanish troops to be recovered. However, on 13 August 1923, a de Havilland DH.9A flown by Captain Cesar Herraiz had to make an emergency landing near Cape Quilates, just east of Al Hoceima Bay. Herraiz, who had been flying from Granada to Melilla, was captured by Rifian forces before he could destroy his aircraft. He also seems to have been flying without an observer.

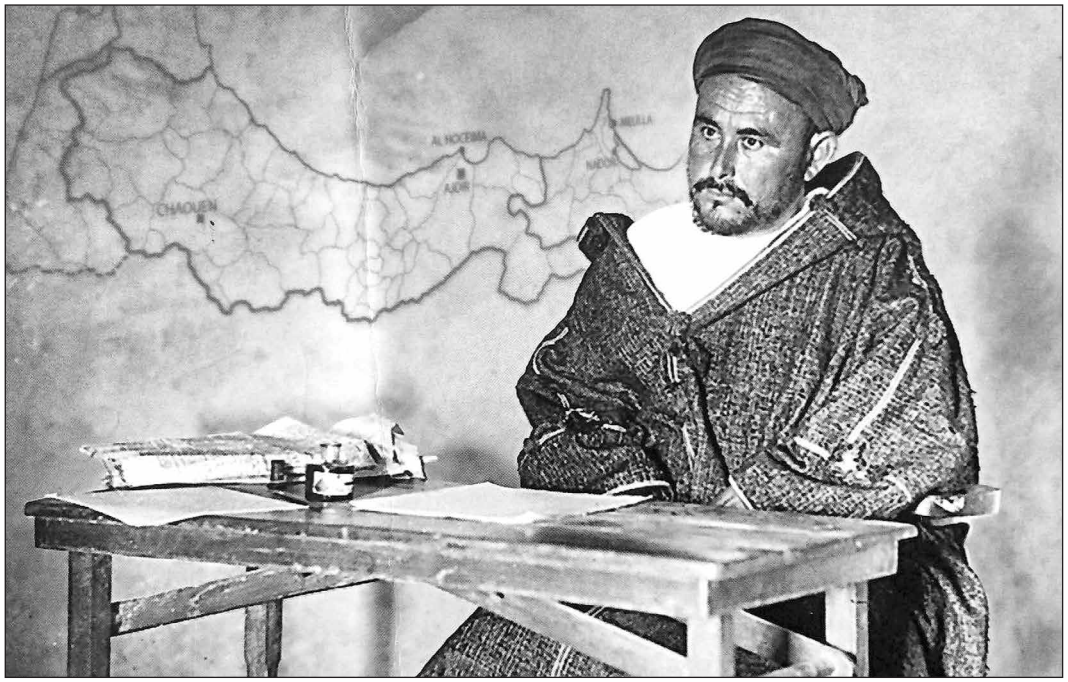
The incident was considered to be so serious that two Spanish squadrons were sent to locate the DH.9, which had suffered damage to its undercarriage during the forced landing. Despite being rapidly covered with branches and assorted shrubbery by its captors, the aeroplane was soon spotted. Its location meant that recovery would be impossible, so a decision was taken on 21 August to bomb it. Although Spanish bombs damaged the de Havilland, they could not entirely destroy it. As a result, the Rifians managed to haul the fuselage and engine to a house in the village of Al Hoceima (now al-Husaymah), where they were stored in the hope of future repair. Perhaps not surprisingly, this proved to be impractical, and eventually the village was overrun by the Spaniards.

Meanwhile, Abd al-Karim and the Rif Republic tried to purchase aeroplanes on the international market. Despite being unable to do this through official channels, Rifian agents did achieve some limited results. In his memoirs, Abd al-Karim described his hopes, efforts and ultimate failure to obtain aircraft:

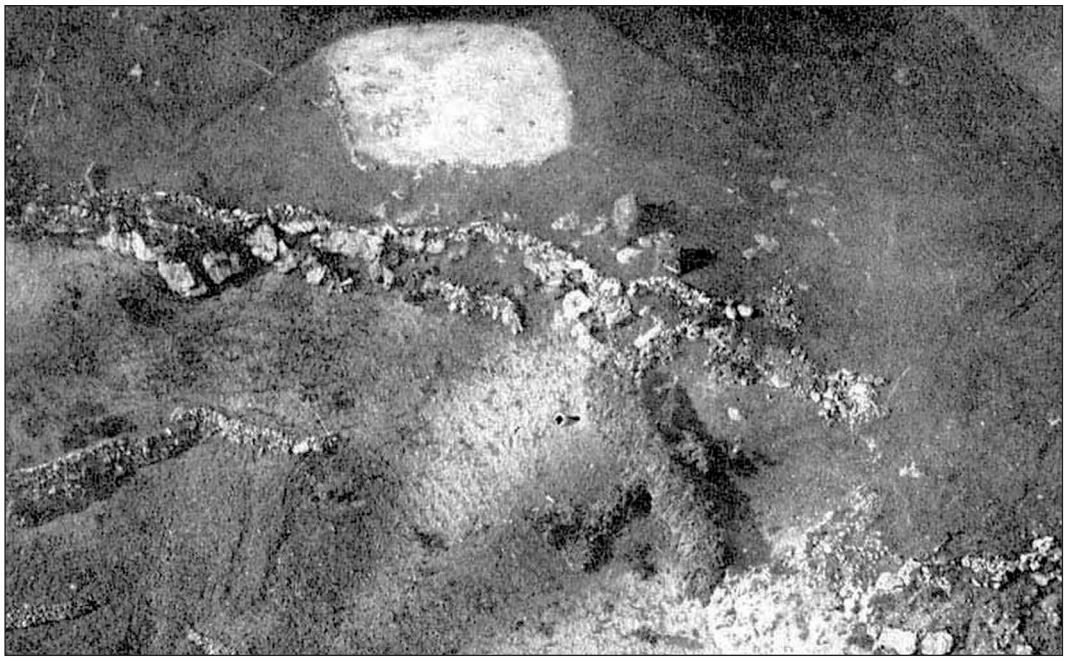
> I knew I could buy aeroplanes from a company that flew between Algiers and Biskra. So I sent, to negotiate [with them], Qaid Haddou and Azerkan. The contract was for three aeroplanes and was concluded through a French officer and airman named Perrier. As I had often been deceived by adventurers, I had formally advised Qaid Haddou and Azerkan to pay only after the aircraft had flown. Haddou embarked in the first plane, which was the only one delivered to us, the others being, as I feared, only junk that remained where they were.
>
> After stopping at Orléansville [now al-Shlif] and Tlemcen, they came to Toufits, north of Taza, in the Rif [unidentified, though Spanish reconnaissance aircraft eventually located the Rifian Dorand at Ait Kamara, a few kilometres south-east of Al Hoceima].
>
> The aeroplane never flew [for the Rif Republic]. I was deeply saddened. I would have given dearly for an armed aeroplane to fly over the Spanish lines. I would have proved to my tribes that I was really armed with modern equipment. My enemies, for their part, would have not failed to be impressed at the sight of a Rifain plane over al-Arash, Titwan and Melilla.

The background to this extraordinary event can be found in 1921, when the ex-Director General of the French Army's Service Aeronautique, Colonel Paul-François Dhe, had established a new airline company called the Syndicat du Reseau Aérien Transafricain, better known simply as SRAT. This company intended to establish a network of air-routes connecting Algiers with major towns of the Algerian interior. For this purpose, Dhe approached the famous First World War fighter ace, Charles Nungesser, who ran a profitable business selling surplus First World War aircraft.

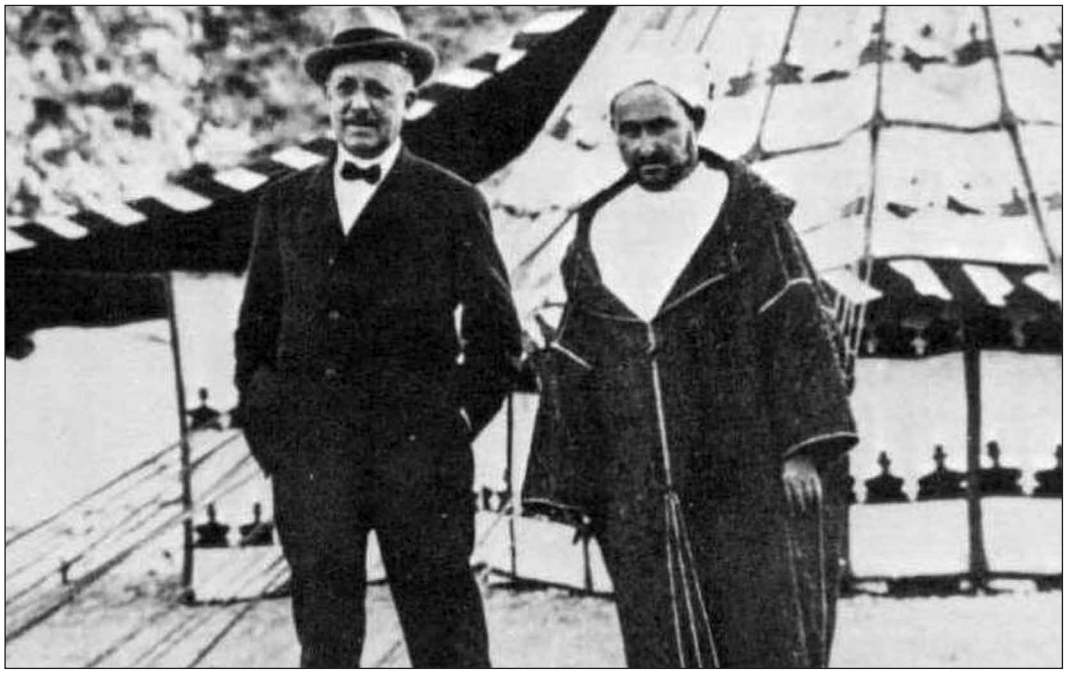
Dhe chose 10 veteran Dorand A.R.2 French reconnaissance machines, which were, unfortunately,



Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Karim al-Khattabi with a wall map of the territory controlled or claimed by the Republic of the Rif within the Spanish Protectorate in northern Morocco. (Author's collection)



The de Havilland DH.9A of Capt. Cesar Herráiz was captured by Rifian forces after making an emergency landing near Cape Quilates, just east of Al Hoceima Bay on 13 August 1923. The Rifians camouflaged the aeroplane with vegetation but the DH.9A's outline still cast a distinctive shadow and the machine was soon found by another Spanish reconnaissance flight. The aeroplane was then bombed to such an extent that it could not be repaired. (IHCA photograph)



A wealthy Spanish industrialist named Horacio Echevarrieta was sent to mediate with Abd al-Karim after the latter's victory at the Battle of Anwal on 22 July 1921. Six years later Echevarrieta founded what would become Iberia Airlines, Spain's national flag carrier. (Author's collection)

in poor condition. Using some of these aeroplanes as a source of spare parts, Dhe and his team managed to make seven A.R.2s airworthy, and on 22 April 1922, the SRAT launched its maiden flight from Algiers to Biskra. For a variety of reasons, the company proved a failure, like so many ambitious or visionary companies set up by veterans from various air forces in the 1920s. This was despite the fact that Dhe had also purchased four Farman F.70 aeroplanes which, unlike the old Dorand A.R.2s, were proper transport machines capable of carrying six passengers. The Farman F.70 was a smaller version of the successful Farman F.60 bomber.

Unable to compete with the larger and financially more powerful Compagnie Aéronautiques Generale d'Entreprises led by Pierre-Georges Latécoère, who refused to collaborate with the SRAT, Dhe's company ceased operations on 1 June 1923. With no alternative but to go into liquidation, Dhe put his aircraft up for sale and Latécoère was happy to get his hands on the four Farman F.70s. Dhe later served with distinction as a long-distance mail pilot and co-authored with Jean Denizel *Les liaisons maritimes, aériennes et terrestres de l'Algérie* (published in Algiers in 1930). For a while, six airworthy Dorand A.R.2s languished in their hanger at Hussein-Dey aerodrome. Meanwhile, the directors of SRAT, now threatened with bankruptcy, were eager to find buyers. This sounded like good news to some of Abd al-Karim's agents, who were still looking for aeroplanes.

The Dorand A.R.2 was a relatively simple but sturdy and useful aeroplane designed in 1916, on the instructions of Colonel Dorand, the Chief of Technical Services in French military aviation. He had realised that that the archaic Farman F.40 pusher type was obsolete, at least for use as a reconnaissance or bomber aeroplane in daylight hours. What Colonel Dorand wanted was a two-seater tractor rather than pusher reconnaissance machine. The Farman company declined, or was unable, to offer a suitable design, so the French Service Aeronautique's own technicians set about designing the aeroplane. In this they were led by Captain Georges Lapère, though the result came to be known as the Dorand Avion Reconnaissance (A.R.).

Its most unusual feature was a negative offset or stagger of the wings, meaning that the upper wing was slightly to the rear of the lower wing – the opposite of what was almost universal amongst biplanes of that time. Furthermore, the lower wings were not attached directly to the fuselage, but were on small struts, mullions or pillars beneath the fuselage. In this respect, the Dorand A.R. was similar to the British Bristol Gordon England G.E.3 biplane, which had been designed for the Ottoman Empire shortly before the First World War (see Volume One).

A Dorand AR.2 reconnaissance bomber, converted into a civilian transport after the First World War and flown by the SRAT company operating between Algeria and Biskra. The registration F-AFCJ of this machine (company identification SRAT Nº 2) was cancelled in November 1927. The Dorand which was flown from Algeria to Rifian territory in northern Morocco on 24 December 1924 was almost certainly SRAT No 4 which is known to have had all markings other than its international registration, F-AFAX, removed before leaving Algeria. (Jarrige Archive)

The Dorand A.R. was produced in substantial numbers during the Great War, while its second and perhaps best-known version, the A.R.2, was credited with being the first aeroplane to be regularly used as an air ambulance to evacuate wounded soldiers from the front in 1917. The two versions of the Dorand A.R. were operated by six different air forces during the First World War, both versions also being used in small numbers, briefly and with little success, by Spain after 1918.

Unfortunately, little else is known about the A.R.2s flown by the SRAT, though French records shown that they included machines with the following French civil registrations: F-AFCJ (registration cancelled in November 1927, company identification number SRAT No 2), F-AFAB (registration cancelled in January 1925, company identification number SRAT No 3), F-AFAC (no record of registration being cancelled, company identification number SRAT No 4) and F-AFDA (withdrawn from use on 1 June 1932, company identification number SRAT No 7). They were said to have been painted an overall cream colour, though perhaps this was merely clear-doped fabric, with numbers and other markings in black.

The identity of the machine flown to the Rif Republic on 24 December 1924 cannot be confirmed, but of the four known French civil-registered aircraft, the fate of three are known, leaving only F-AFAC as a mystery. It seems probable that this was the Dorand A.R.2 flown to Rifian territory. Information about this flight comes from a number of marginal sources, including the chief engineer of the Latécoère company, Monsieur Boves, as well as Joseph Roig, the regional director of this company in Morocco, and the Spanish journalist Victor Ruiz Albéniz. The latter wrote under the pseudonym El Tebib Arrumi.

These men stated that, on 21 or 22 December 1923, some "senior personages" arrived at the SRAT hanger at Hussein-Dey aerodrome. According to the testimony of Boves, these men were Moroccans, looked like natives of the Titwan region and spoke correct French. They were almost certainly Abd al-Karim's two representatives, Qaid Haddou and Azerkan. According to Boves, they examined the Dorands, of which only four were currently in a usable state, the other being "totally useless". Having looked over the aeroplanes, tested their controls and checked the electrical circuits, they departed. The following day, SRAT personnel tuned the engine of one Dorand and got it ready for a long flight.

On 24 December one of SRAT's pilots, reportedly called Periel but actually named Perrier, took off for an unknown destination at 0730 hours. With him was Qaid Haddou. Other information suggests that this pilot was subsequently killed in a flying accident. Suspecting what might be going on, and sensitive about its own relationship with the Spanish government, the Latécoère office informed the French authorities. Colonel Cassé, the Director of French Civil Aviation, promptly ordered that the remaining Dorands remain at Hussein-Dey aerodrome. Meanwhile, the Spanish authorities received information that Abd al-Karim may have got hold of an aircraft, which indeed he had.

A subsequent official enquiry produced a further account of this event from Paul Vachet, the chief aviation engineer at Wahran (then known as Oran). Vachet had just arrived at the aerodrome outside Algiers to take delivery of a Farman F.70 for the Latécoère company, when he noticed unusual activity around the old Dorand aeroplanes of SRAT in their portable Bessonneau hanger on 21 or 22 December 1923. He saw Mr Ducas, the general director of the SRAT, and two Moroccans, one in the traditional costume of northern Morocco, the other wearing a European suit and a Moroccan fez, and both speaking excellent French.

Vachet recalled: "I noticed a certain activity around these devices as well as the comings and goings of some Arabs whose quality as notables was recognisable by their clean and impeccable clothes. But I did not otherwise pay attention." Nevertheless, he did notice that the Moroccans were studying the Dorands with closer interest than that shown by ordinary visitors, feeling the tension of the canvas, getting into the cockpits and trying the seats. The French aero engineer then got on with his own job of preparing for a long flight back to France via Morocco and Spain. Upon returning to Algiers after this journey, Vachet heard some interesting news from a colleague named Massol, who told him what had been going on while he was away.

The Muslim notables who had been looking at the SRAT's old Dorands had indeed been emissaries from Abd al-Karim, and one of the aeroplanes had since disappeared with one of the company's pilots. According to Vachet:

> This affair made a great noise at the time, and the aeronautical authorities of Algiers, alerted by our people, banned new departures. The contract concluded by Abd al-Karim and the director of the defunct airline was therefore not fully completed. As for the pilot who had flown the only aircraft to be delivered, he died a few months later in an aviation accident.

In his subsequent testimony to an official Spanish commission of enquiry, Vachet also stated that the day after this visit, there was great excitement amongst SRAT personnel, including the chief mechanic and storekeeper who were carefully getting the Dorand ready for a long flight, whereas the Dorands had previously only received cursory technical attention. All written marks except for the registration letters were carefully erased, a more suitable seat was added, perhaps for the passenger, additional fuel or perhaps an extra fuel tank was supplied, and the engine was tested. When asked about the aeroplane's destination, SRAT staff gave evasive replies, while Perrier, the company's chief and currently only pilot, stated that he neither knew where the machine was going, nor who would fly it. Another man named Monsieur Marc also arrived at the aerodrome, seeking to purchase the planes, but was told that they were no longer available, though no reason was given.

According to Vachet, the ex-SRAT Dorand A.R.2 took off from Algiers' Hussein-Dey aerodrome on 23 or 24 December, flown by Perrier but without a passenger. Abd al-Karim, however, stated that Perrier was accompanied by Qaid Haddou. Might Perrier have landed somewhere during his flight to Morocco to pick up his Moroccan passenger and guide? Other unconfirmed information mentions a refuelling stop at Tlemcen, close to the Moroccan frontier.

There is also the testimony of Beppo de Massimi, a well-known Italian pilot who had learned to fly in Naples, had volunteered to serve in the French Aéronautique Militaire in August 1914, became a close associate of Georges Latécoère after the Great War and was appointed head of the Latécoère company's Madrid office. According to de Massimi, by March 1924, rumours were spreading in Spain that the Latécoère company was also involved in the Rifian Republic's attempts to get hold of aircraft. Colonel Cassé, the director of French Aeronautics, was therefore contacted in order to get more precise information. Cassé confirmed that he had been warned that a second aeroplane might try to fly from Algeria to Rifian-held territory in northern Morocco, and that he had consequently ordered that all "maintenance equipment" along this route be dismantled and placed under French military guard.

Meanwhile, the Spanish in Morocco tried to locate the missing Dorand A.R.2, continuing to do so through the early months of 1924. During the resulting reconnaissance flights, Spanish fliers reported that the Rifians had apparently been clearing various areas to create what might have been a number of airfields, though without seeing evidence that any had yet been used as such.

The squadrons based at Melilla were particularly active in this quest, focussing on a number of areas including the Rish and Nakor valleys south of Al Hoceima, and on the village of Ait Kamara, where there had also been intelligence reports of an airfield. Finally, on 25 and 26 January, aerial photographs seemed to justify these reports. The Rif Republic had one aeroplane, hoped to get others and was already trying to recruit qualified pilots.

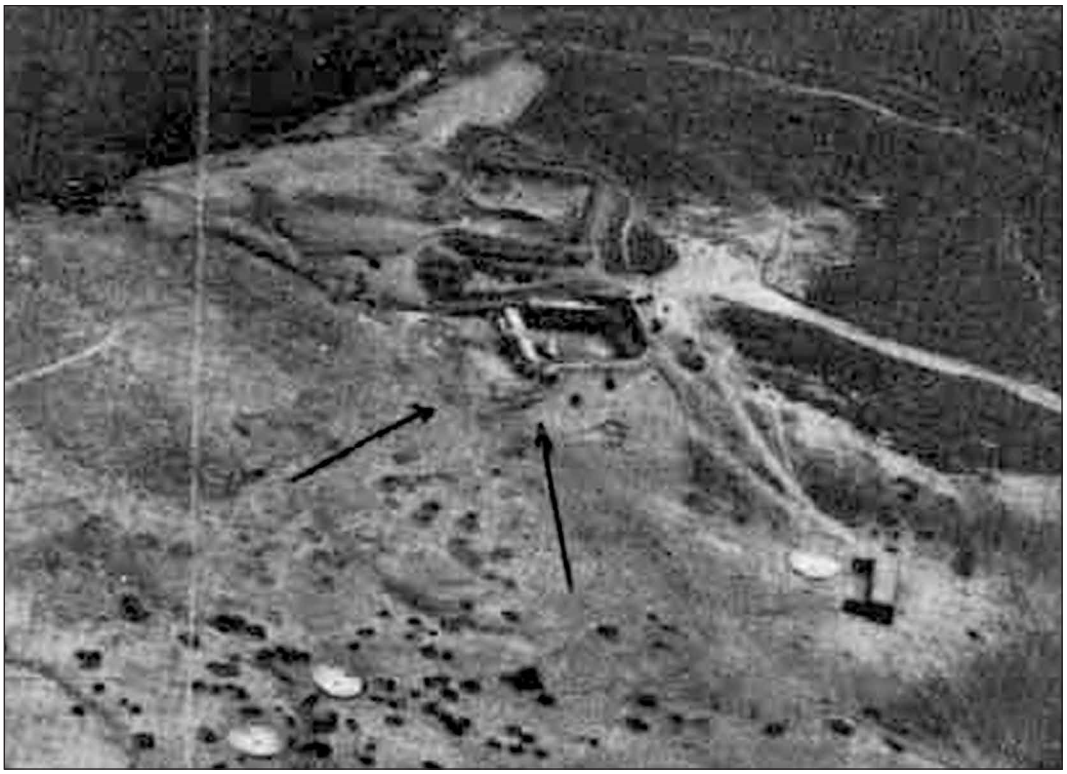
In the 1920s, there appeared to be many adventurers who might prove useful. One such was J. Abad, a man of Spanish origin who moved between Paris and various North African cities,

Carlos Greco was an Italian-Argentine airman, seen here during an air festival in Majorca in 1921 where he flew his Caudron G.3. The following year Carlos Greco was reportedly contacted by Abd al-Karim's agents who not only hired him to fly for the Rif Republic but agreed that he should become the Chief of the Rifian Air Force. (Jose Vila collection)

presenting himself as the Rif Republic's Delegate and Head of Aviation. He contacted a number of French pilots who reportedly expressed an interest in flying for the Rif Republic. On the other side, the Spanish journalist Victor Ruiz Albéniz pointed a finger at the Italian-Argentine airman Carlos Greco. In 1921 and 1922, Greco had been performing at various air shows in Spain, flying an old Caudron G.3. While in Seville, Greco had supposedly been contacted by Abd al-Karim's agents, who not only hired him to fly for the Rif Republic but had agreed that he should become the Chief of the Rifian Air Force.

Back in northern Morocco, a dawn patrol of two Spanish Bristol aeroplanes set off, as usual, on 21 March 1924. One Bristol (serial number 21) was piloted by Lieutenant Manuel Martinez Merino, with Lieutenant Armando Solis Flores as observer, while the other (serial number 40) was crewed by pilot Ensign Francisco Coterillo Llano and observer Commandant Luis Rueda Ledesma. While flying over the suspected airfield at Tizzi-Moren near Al Hoceima, they not only saw the sheds which were already known of, but what appeared to be an aeroplane covered with branches cut from trees. They took photographs and then headed back to their own aerodrome at Tauima, just south of the town of Melilla.

According to the Spanish squadron's operational diary, the two aircrews thought that the camouflaged aeroplane was a Brequet and appeared to be in an excavated depression surrounded by raised earth and covered with branches. In other words, the machine was sheltered within what might now be called a blast pen. The location was more than 100km from the nearest Spanish position, so on the following day, 22 March, the Spaniards launched an intensive aerial bombardment of the area. This continued on the 23rd and was carried out by de Havilland aircraft of the Third Group and Bristols of the Fourth Group.



A reconnaissance photograph taken on 21 March 1924 by Lt. Armando Solis Flores, the observer in Spanish Bristol F2B number 21 piloted by Lt. Manuel Martinez Merino. It shows the Dorand AR.2 purchased by the Rif Republic in a pen or shelter at Tizzi-Moren. (IHCA photograph)

They dropped a total of 540 bombs, despite what was described as energetic ground fire from rifles, machine guns and even, reportedly, artillery. One of the pilots, Lieutenant Juan Antonio Ansaldo Vejarano, was wounded in the leg. The attack continued on 24 March. Photographs taken by the leader of the de Havilland group, Commandant Jose Carrillo, and his observer, Lieutenant Angel Lopez Orduña, were studied carefully and appeared to show that the aeroplane which had been attacked the previous day had since been replaced by a canvas decoy. However, later evidence seemed to indicate that only the broken remains of an aircraft's wings actually remained at Tizzi-Moren. In the middle of April, a further reconnaissance flight by Captain Jose Carrillo and observer Lieutenant Angel Orduña in a Bristol found further large sheds, which intelligence reports indicated would have been used by the Rif Republic's intended air arm. The unfortunate Orduña would be killed in action five months later (see Volume Three).

Abd al-Karim's hopes of creating a Rifian Air Force seemed to have been destroyed, along with his aeroplanes. Nevertheless, Abd al-Karim's government was still looking for suitable machines, as indicated by a letter handed to an official of Latécoère Airlines based at Wahran (Oran) aerodrome. Written by one his pilots, named Joly, it was dated 24 June 1924 and is worth quoting at length:

> Monsieur le Director,
> I apologize for not sending this letter to you through the chain of command. This is a very serious matter with respect to the operation of the line and I did not want it to be given to the Air Chief before you became aware of it. On Wednesday 11th June I returned to the office when the administrative agent introduced me as a pilot to a gentleman who had just reserved his place on the following day's flight from Oran to Fez.
>
> This gentleman handed me a card which I slipped into my pocket without even glancing at it. It was only after his departure that the administrative agent asked me if I had read the card. I took it out of my pocket and read:
>
> 'Mr J. Abad, Chief of Aviation and Delegate of the Group of the Rifian Republic, Grand Hotel du Louvre, Paris'.

On Thursday, 12 June, Joly's flight from Wahran in Algeria to Fez in Morocco was completed, though delayed for a while by weather conditions. Joly left his passenger in Fez but saw him the following Sunday, when Abad was again amongst his passengers, this time from Fez back to Wahran. Joly's letter continued:

> I had completely forgotten this gentleman, when on Sunday, June 22, finding me with a friend at the Café Continental, my passenger mentioned above asked me if we would have an aperitif with him at the Guillaume Tell Brewery. He also asked if he could speak with me for ten minutes (in private), but I apologized, saying that I would not leave my comrade alone. With that, he gave me an appointment for the next day at 11:30.

Somewhat intrigued, the French pilot arrived on time, but the mysterious Monsieur Abad did not. Instead, he turned up at Joly's hotel and apologised, saying that he had been delayed by a meeting with the Spanish consul. Joly continued:

> Then he said to me; 'I have a proposal to make to you. I am in Oran with a lieutenant of Abd al-Karim, and we would like to join the Rifians by aeroplane. I thought that you might drop us off in Rif territory before reaching Fez. It would be easy for you and no one will know, think about it if you can.'

Pilot Joly, who had been an officer during the Great War, turned down this offer without a second thought; he also carried air mail during these flights, which was almost a sacred trust. Joly therefore asked Abad to leave. Later that day, Joly decided to ask his superior for advice, especially as he was already known to Colonel Cassé, whom, he feared, might put some of the blame on Joly himself. It sometimes seems as if the romantic and exotic popular spy fiction set in North Africa between the world wars was more real than might be expected.

Muhammad Abd al-Karim al-Khattabi was a thoroughly modern leader, one of the first in the westernmost countries of the Arab world. Some of his senior opponents – Spanish and French, political and military – recognised this fact, yet the Western world in general insisted on portraying 'Abdul Krim' as a courageous throwback to a romanticised Oriental or Moorish past. The film industry's fascination with such figures had already produced *The Sheik*, a silent film released in 1921 starring Rudolph Valentino

The Surrender of Abd al-Karim to French forces on 26 May 1926 at Tagist in northern Morocco. (Albert Grandolini collection)

and Agnes Ayres. Based on a best-selling novel of the same name by Edith Maude Hull published two years earlier, it was a box office hit and helped make Valentino a star.

More specifically, however, an operetta entitled *The Desert Song* was directly inspired by the Rif Rising, though the show largely focussed upon events in the French rather than the Spanish protectorate. Once again, a successful film version appeared in 1929. Reflecting the racial prejudices of the time, the heroic Rif leader known in *The Desert Song* as the Red Shadow was secretly the son of the French general who was sent to defeat him. One wonders what Abd al-Karim made of *The Desert Song*, which he must surely have come across, either during his exile on Reunion Island from 1926-47 or in his later years in Egypt, where he died in 1963.

4
FROM A HIJAZI TO A SAUDI ARABIAN AIR FORCE

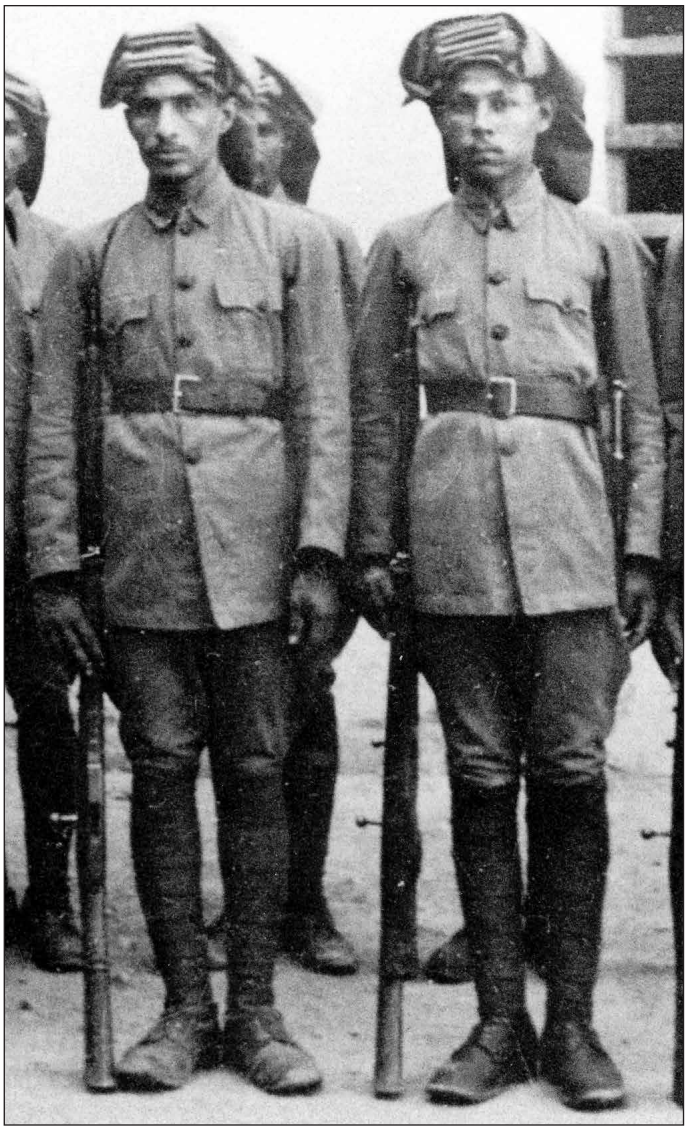
At the end of the First World War, the Hashemite Kingdom of the Hijaz, which had declared its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1916, emerged as one of the victorious Allies. Its ruler was Husayn Ibn Ali, the Sharif of Mecca who had been recognised as king by the Allied Powers – France, Italy and Great Britain – on 3 January 1917. He would be succeeded by his eldest son, Ali Ibn Husayn, in 1924. Meanwhile, another son, Faisal Ibn Husayn, claimed the Kingdom of Syria and would reign until July 1920, while a third son, Abdullah Ibn Hussain, was set to become Amir of Transjordan. However, the Kingdom of Hijaz only consisted of the western coastal region of the Arabian Peninsula and had long faced a rival in the form of the Saudi-ruled Amir of Riyadh, Abd al-Aziz Ibn Sa'ud, who promoted himself to the rank of Sultan of Najd in 1921.

While Saudi power grew, that of the Kingdom of Hijaz waned, and within a few years the Hashimite state was effectively abandoned to its fate by its erstwhile British, French, Italian and American allies. Britain took a brutally practical view: its interests lay in the stability of the Red Sea area, so it would recognise whoever could provide such stability. Italy and France, both of whom ruled territories on the other side of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, took a similar view. Meanwhile, the USA soon developed close commercial, political and eventually military links with the Saudis through their mutual interest in a rapidly expanding oil industry.

To the south were independent Yemen and the briefly independent or more accurately autonomous Idrisid Amirate of Asir, which lay between Yemen and the Hijaz. Neither of these yet had any aviation of their own. The fate of Asir mirrored that of Hashimite Hijaz but caused even less of a stir in the outside world. Its Amir, Sayyid Muhammad Ibn Ali al-Idrisi, had risen against his Ottoman overlords during the Great War and for a while enjoyed British support, though remaining a nominal vassal of the Ottoman Caliphate until the latter was formally abolished in 1924.

In 1917, a potential quarrel between Asir and Hijaz – both of which were being supported by the British against the Ottomans – had been resolved when Asir handed over the frontier town of Qunfudh in return for the supposedly Hashimite but actually British-held Farasan Islands. However, the Idrisid Amir only controlled the rugged but fertile hills of Asir and his capital, the little town of Sabya, plus a short length of Red Sea coastline. Asir was also split between the dominant Idrisids in the south and the Aidids around the hill town of Abha in the north, an area also called Upper Asir. In 1920, Muhammad Ibn Ali al-Idrisi died and Asir became a bone of contention between Yemen and Saudi Najd. The Saudis imposed their protectorate over Upper Asir in 1923, then over Asir as a whole in 1927, having taken control of the Hijaz in 1925, before formally annexing the entire area through the Treaty of Taif in 1934.

Meanwhile, the British retook control of the Farasan Islands in 1926, effectively drawing them into the Aden Protectorate. The British, of course, already dominated Egypt and the Sudan on the other side of the Red Sea, while the Red Sea's African coastline south of the Sudan was that of Italian-ruled Eritrea. After Mussolini came to power in Rome in 1922, the previously friendly relationship in the Red Sea region between a dominant Britain and a decidedly secondary Italy became much more competitive, though as yet still peaceful.



Hashemite Arab Army infantry 1918. They had been almost entirely equipped by the British during the First World War. (Martyrs' Memorial Museum, Amman)

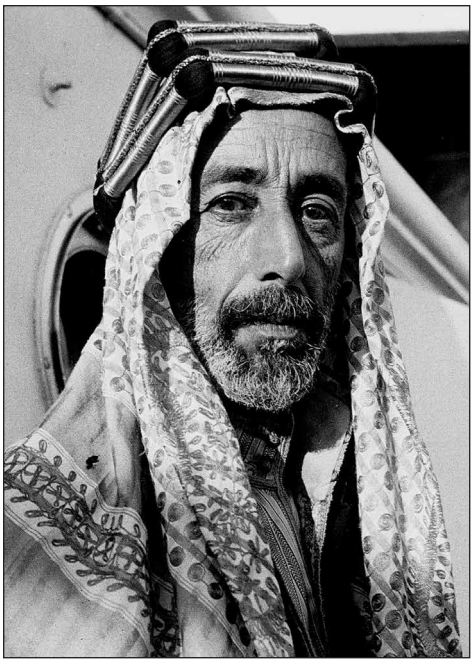
Sharif Husayn Ibn Ali, head of the Hashemite family, had been the Amir of Mecca since November 1908. He then ruled the area as an independent monarch from October 1916 to 3 October 1924, when he abdicated. (Royal Jordanian Geographical Society)

While Italy dabbled in the affairs of Asir and Yemen, the British continued to support the Hijaz, at least for a few years. This was a period when the first real Arab air force was established by the Hashimite Kingdom of Hijaz in 1921. The isolated Ottoman garrison in Madina had finally surrendered to the victorious Allies on 9 January 1919, having kept the Ottoman flag flying over Islam's second holiest city for 72 days after the Ottoman government signed the Armistice of Mudros and only after General Ömer Fahrettin Pasha, the commander of the garrison, had been arrested by his own men. However, this garrison also left behind at least one serviceable aeroplane, an Albatros C-III (number AK 30). Other sources suggest that a second machine, apparently an AEG, was also present in 1919 or 1920. It may have been an ex-Ottoman AEG C-IV, perhaps one of No. 14 Squadron's damaged aeroplanes which had fallen into the hands of the Arab Revolt as it swept up through Ma'an and Amman in Transjordan in 1918. However, no other information is currently available concerning this AEG and there is no evidence that either of these aircraft ever flew for the Kingdom of Hijaz.

What is clear is that, in 1921, King Husayn Ibn Ali of Hijaz was eager to create an air force to face the rising threat from Ibn Sa'ud of Najd. Such an ambition continued under his son and successor, King Ali Ibn Husayn, who ruled the Hijaz from 3 October 1924 until 19 December 1926. With no trained or qualified local Arab personnel, the Hijazi Air Force (sometimes also called the Hijazi Flying Corps) would be almost entirely operated by a varied and exotic band of mercenaries.

Infantrymen of the Sharifian Hashemite Regular Army around 1919. (Martyrs' Memorial Museum, Amman)

So it was that, on 29 June 1921, Colonel T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) arrived at Jiddah, the traditional pilgrim port for Mecca, aboard the Italian merchant ship *Massaua*. With him was Captain Brooke, a retired RAF officer. There they met King Husayn, who had already ordered some second-hand aeroplanes. These were two de Havilland DH.9s, two 160hp Beardmore-



Ali Ibn Husayn took over the Hashemite Hijaz as King on the abdication of his father, the Amir Husayn Ibn Ali. King Ali had to flee the country a little over a year later as the Hijaz fell to Saudi forces, but did not abandon his claim to the throne until later. Ali Ibn Husain was here photographed off the Palestinian port of Jaffa in 1933. (Author's collection)

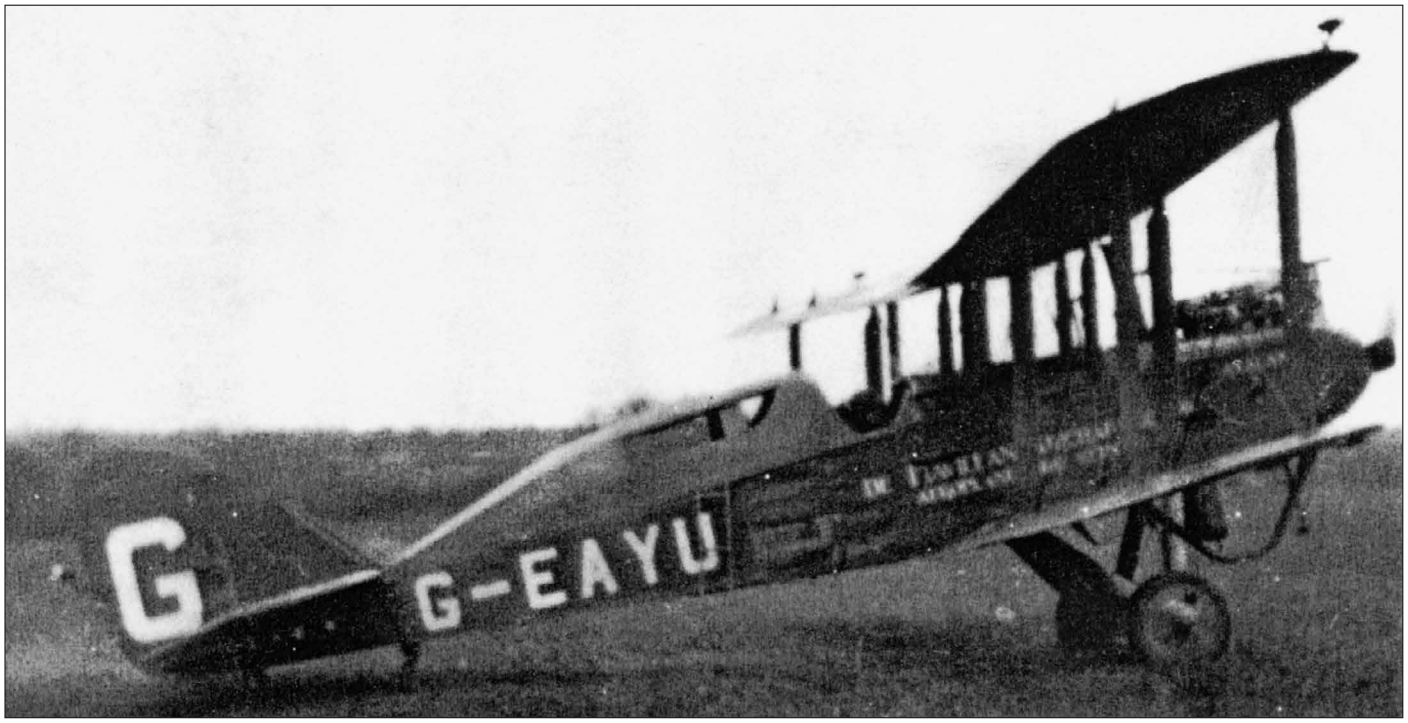
engined Armstrong Whitworths, almost certainly FK.8s, plus four spare engines, purchased from the Schumacher and Lavison company based in Cairo. Hugo Schumacher had himself acquired a substantial number of redundant British machines from the Aircraft Disposals Board in England. A few days after Brooke and Lawrence arrived in Arabia, the British authorities approved the sale of these old aeroplanes to the Kingdom of Hijaz, where they arrived aboard the Egyptian Khedival Mail Line ship *Tantah* on 6 August 1921.

Landing grounds were prepared outside Mecca and Taif, while air and ground crew were recruited. The latter were described as a motley collection of adventure-seeking Germans and anti-Bolshevik White Russians (as distinct from Red or Soviet Russians). Perhaps it would be more correct to say that these men were seeking employment, as both Germans and White Russians represented sides which had been defeated in recent conflicts. Most signed up for only a short period, though one Russian refugee, Nikolai Naidenov, who had served as a pilot in the White Army during the Russian Civil War, would remain in the Hijaz for several years.

In November 1924, several more war-surplus Airco de Havilland DH.9s and one or perhaps two DH.9Cs arrived in the Hijaz. The latter was a version of the DH.9 which had been converted to carry three passengers (two in an enclosed cabin). With the British civil registration G-EAYU, this machine been operated by the de Havilland Aeroplane Hire Service Ltd. Schumacher's offer to sell another 20 unspecified aeroplanes (probably DH.9s) was turned down by the Hijazi ruler, who was more interested in additional trained personnel to make proper use of the machines he already had. It was a clash of foreign commercial arms dealing and local defence needs which would be repeated many times and continues to this day.

According to Colonel Ivanoff, one of the Russian mercenary pilots, only two of these DH.9s were "more or less capable of flying. One was a DH.9 with an open body, while the other was a DH9 with a closed 'limousine' (the DH.9C), which made it practically useless for war purposes. The latter machine very seldom left the aerodrome, and when it did go up it remained in the air for only a few minutes."

The Kingdom of Hijaz had already purchased seven other war-surplus aeroplanes from Italy, via a wealthy Genoese industrialist. These were Italian-built Maurice Farman trainers with 100hp Fiat engines (the license-built MF.11 known as a Fiat SIA.5) and Caudrons with 120–130hp Le Rhône engines (probably G.3bis), acquired from the Cooperativa Nazionale Aeronautica. The Caudrons had apparently initially been intended for the Italian colony of Somalia. However, these machines arrived on 16 August



A de Havilland DH.9C, registered to the de Havilland Aircraft Company on 12 October 1921 and then operated by the de Havilland Aeroplane Hire Service. It was sold to the Hijazi Air Force on 3 November 1924 and may have retained its British civil registration (G-EAYU) for some time. (de Havilland Museum)

Leonida Schiona in 1929, with a Junkers F.13 of the Italian Societa Transadriatica airline, on his return from a flight over the Alps from Venice to Bavaria. During the 1920s Schiona was involved in establishing both the Hashemite Hijazi and the Yemeni Air Forces. (Schiona family archive)

1921, accompanied by an Italian pilot and a mechanic. Eight ex-Italian Spad fighters were also rumoured to be on their way, but this proved incorrect.

Unfortunately, the Italian aircraft had been exported without a valid certificate and there had apparently been attempts to camouflage the entire sale. A man named Tullio Pastori, a dealer in aeroplanes, motor cars and other technical equipment, seems to have been the middleman, along with Constantine Yanni, who was described as a Syrian-Greek employee of the Hijazi Aviation Department. Meanwhile, Leonida Schiona, a well-known Italian pilot who had flown bombers and scouts during the First World War, seemingly obtained a licence to send the four Caudrons to Somalia to establish an air postal service, but this was a cover for the actual sale to the Hijaz.

Schiona may have been the Italian pilot who arrived in Arabia with these aircraft, but this is again unconfirmed. Less than a year earlier, on 1 November 1920, Schiona had been licenced as Italy's first true commercial pilot and had used a Caudron with an 80hp engine to start Italy's first civilian passenger service. When this machine caught fire at 1,200 metres, as a result of a broken fuel line, Schiona managed to make a hurried emergency landing. The aeroplane was destroyed, but neither Schiona nor his passenger was hurt. Schiona now purchased a more powerful 110hp Caudron and continued to fly passengers with his own company, called the Incremento Navigazione Civile Aerea. Around the same time, a wealthy Roman aristocrat named Count Giovanni Bonmartini purchased all the redundant, ex-Great War aeroplanes at Marcon aerodrome near Venice. These included a number of Hanriot scouts, which Count Bonmartini's team of engineers and craftsmen made airworthy before selling them to flying clubs in Milan and Bologna. Many were apparently flown or delivered by Schiona. Perhaps they also included the Hanriot HD.1 which Schiona later delivered to Yemen (see Chapter Five).

The first aeroplane to be assembled for the new Hijazi Air Force was one of the Caudrons, and it was flown three times around Jiddah early in September 1921. In October, this Caudron was flown to Taif by an unnamed Italian pilot but crashed when taking off for a return trip to Jiddah. The Briton Captain Brooke next flew to Taif in a DH.9, but he also to came to grief, damaging the undercarriage while landing; both the Caudron and the de Havilland had to remain at Taif. Brooke soon returned to Cairo, but a Russian mechanic named Maximov, who had followed Brooke to the Hijaz, signed a six-month contract and was sent to repair the two damaged aeroplanes. This he had done by the start of December 1921, and on the 4th of that month Maximov and Nikolai Naidenov flew the DH.9 back to Jiddah. They were initially accompanied by two Italian airmen in another Caudron, but the latter had to make an emergency landing about 13km from Mecca. No serious damage was done this time, but it was necessary to disassemble the aircraft and bring it back to Jiddah on baggage camels. Meanwhile, the damaged first Caudron remained at Taif.

Fighting between the Hashimite army and Abd al-Aziz Ibn Sa'ud's forces was now intensifying, and Naidenov was twice sent on bombing missions against Sa'udi warriors at Turabah. On each occasion, he was accompanied by an unnamed Arab officer who acted as observer and bomb-aimer. This kind of mission was not in Naidenov's contract, however, so he decided the risk was greater than the reward and returned to Egypt by the next available boat. Meanwhile, Italian records show that in February 1922, the Hijazi Air Force's two Armstrong Whitworths were still in their packing cases. One of the DH.9s was in good operational condition, but another was already in need of vital spare parts. Two Maurice Farmans similarly remained unassembled, and the one Caudron in Jiddah was regarded as useless. This left two Caudrons at Taif, one described as being in good condition while the other was still being repaired by an Italian mechanic named Delicata.

Three other Russian pilots – Jungmeister (perhaps a German rather than a Russian), Minchanok and Kousnietsov – had now been recruited, along with a Russian mechanic named Agnaiev. A Greek pilot, Constantino Stavris, and a Greek mechanic named Seleguene had also arrived from Egypt on 5 January 1922. The competence of some of them left something to be desired, or perhaps they were just unfamiliar with conditions in Arabia, even in winter. Thus, on 10 January, the Russian pilot Minchanok attempted a demonstration flight to impress King Husayn when the latter came to inspect the aerodrome but crashed almost at the monarch's feet – apparently fatally. According to a British intelligence officer who witnessed the event, Husayn left the scene without comment.

On 25 February, one of the other pilots, Jungmeister, crashed a Caudron at Taif, while Kousnietsov declared that, because he was an expert in flying seaplanes, he could not be expected to fly land-planes. The survivors were soon dismissed. Colonel Ivanoff gave a different explanation of the death of his Russian colleague, blaming the incident on the Hijazi military command. This, he said, had ordered the Russian and his local observer to Taif, where

Leonida Schiona in 1933, on his return to Rome from flight to the Holy Land of Palestine. After being involved in the early years of Hijazi and Yemeni aviation, Schiona's experience of flying in the Arab world made him useful during the Italian government's efforts to expand its influence in the Middle East. (Schiona family archive)

they found that Hijazi troops had already evacuated the town. According to Ivanoff, when the plane landed it was "soon shot to pieces and the wounded pilot and his observer were brutally murdered". Perhaps these were two separate incidents, and the pilot of the aeroplane which crashed at the king's feet had not been killed.

The reason why the Hijazi Air Force was created was to attack Saudi forces which had no aeroplanes with which to respond. Considerable effort was therefore put into getting an operational DH.9 to Taif, which lay closer to the scene of operations. There was little in the way of a military 'front' in this very dispersed conflict, but enemy-held Klaikh and Turabah were obvious targets. Constantino Stavris made one attempt to attack Turabah in February, having taken off from Taif. In March, he again attempted to bomb the same location, but the following month he and the Italian mechanic Delicata flew the sole operational Caudron back to Jiddah. The damaged Caudron was also transported to Jiddah to be used as a source of spare parts.

The Hijazi Air Force now only had one pilot willing to fly operationally, so King Husayn's representatives contacted Leonida Schiona, who was currently teaching students to fly on civilianised three-engined Caproni Ca.32 and Ca.33 ex-bombers at Vizzola Ticino aerodrome outside Varese in northern Italy. Having presumably offered Schiona a new contract, and perhaps encouraging him to recruit other men, the Hijazi Air Force expected the Italian plus 10 other pilots and mechanics to soon appear in Arabia. Meanwhile, the Italian government was said to have arranged to send an unspecified type of "fighting aircraft", plus machine guns, bombs and an armoured car. Unfortunately, all those promises proved to be just rumours, as Schiona had actually been contracted to fly in Japan. Schiona would nevertheless subsequently set up a flying training school in Yemen (see Chapter Five).

Back in the Hijaz, the Greek Stavris and the Russian Maximov were told to fly to Madina, where they should place themselves under the command of King Husayn's son, the Amir Ali, for operations against the advancing Sa'udis. Both men refused, and when the Italian airman Delicata joined their protest, the king ordered that the aerodrome be closed. On 12 April 1922, Maximov departed for Egypt, closely followed by Stavris and Delicata.

As a result, a Russian mechanic named Klibensy, who had only arrived from Cairo on 8 April, found that he was the only person in the Hijazi Air Force until another Russian mercenary, Naidenov, returned to Arabia in August. On their own they could do virtually nothing until Constantine Yanni, the Syrian-Greek employee of the Hijazi Aviation Department, went to Egypt in late 1922 or very early 1923 to recruit more men. This resulted in another Russian pilot named Shirokov and four mechanics joining Naidenov and Klibensky in January 1923. Somehow, a few aeroplanes had been made nominally operational, and on 23 March, Shirokov flew from Jiddah to Taif and back in an Armstrong Whitworth, reportedly carrying a Russian mechanic (presumably Klibensky) and an unnamed Arab flying student as passengers. As the Armstrong Whitworth FK.8 was a two-seater, it seems more likely that Klibensky was on board during a preliminary test flight, followed by a longer flight with the student.

The struggle between the Hashemite Kingdom of Hijaz and Abd al-Aziz Ibn Sa'ud of Najd moved emphatically in favour of the latter in 1924. Nevertheless, during the early part of the year, a number of sorties were flown by the Hijazi Air Force over the Turabah area to harass Sa'udi forces. Once again, Ivanoff was highly critical of the Hijazi military command, which, he claimed,

had no idea of the proper role of aeroplanes in war. According to Ivanoff, they frequently gave the pilots ridiculous orders. He stated that "it was not uncommon for them [the pilots] to be asked to fly to some remote spot in the desert to kill a group of five or six Bedouin said to be implicated in the theft of a few sheep". This was clearly an embittered exaggeration, though the use of aeroplanes to keep control of troublesome Bedouin tribes would not be confined to the Hijazi Air Force.

On 3 March, King Husayn declared himself to be Caliph of the Sunni Muslim world during a visit to his son Abdullah's winter camp at Shunah in the Jordan Valley, in Transjordan. This claim had what might charitably be described as a mixed reception amongst Muslims worldwide. Meanwhile, Husayn refused to form an official alliance with Britain because this would have made him look like a client of the British Empire. Towards the end of March, the British government ended its financial subsidising of Abd al-Aziz Ibn Sa'ud, the Sultan of Najd, which had the unintended consequence of making Ibn Sa'ud feel he was now a free agent. Owing nothing to the British, he could press his attack upon Britain's 'friend', the Hashemite King of Hijaz.

On the other side, one of the Hijazi Air Force's Russian pilots, Colonel Ivanoff, suddenly left in March 1924 and travelled to Baghdad, on his way to Persia (Iran), where he hoped to find a perhaps safer flying job. The Imperial Iranian Air Force was, in fact, in the process of being established (see Volume Three). Ivanoff appears to have returned to Iraq the following year, as he was interviewed there by a correspondent from *The Times* newspaper of London. Ivanoff's account of the Hijazi Air Force's struggle against Abd al-Aziz Ibn Sa'ud was colourful and decidedly prejudiced against his former employers. It also contained information about the period after Ivanoff had left, so he presumably kept in touch with other mercenaries who served both King Husayn and his son, King Ali.

On 20 August 1924, Ibn Sa'ud launched a full-scale invasion of the Hijaz, whereupon King (and self-proclaimed Caliph) Husayn abdicated and his son Ali came to the throne. Mecca, the holiest city in Islam, fell to the enemy on 13 October, and King Ali Ibn Husayn's army fell back to the port of Jiddah. According to Ivanoff, all remained quiet for some time, while Ibn Sa'ud forces awaited the arrival of reinforcements and artillery. For their part, Ivanoff said that King Ali's troops, "being inferior in numbers, decided that it was politic to remain behind the barbed wire defences of the city". Two months were spent making the enclave around Jiddah into a fortified camp. The Hijazi Air Force tried to help but was so short of men and machines that it could do little. Nevertheless, Ivanoff maintained that, "the airmen were sent out from Jiddah to make reconnaissances of the road leading to the town. Sometimes they bombed the Wahhabi [Sa'udi] camps."

Meanwhile, the war continued and on 22 November, the merchant ship *Nore* unloaded three timeworn de Havilland DH.9s at Jiddah. These aeroplanes had come from the United Kingdom, and two (or perhaps only one) of them were DH.9Cs, the version which included an enclosed cabin for passengers. Two weeks earlier, three British pilots – J.R. King, R.H. MacIntosh and W. Wigglesworth – had been contracted to operate these aeroplanes on behalf of the Hijazi Air Force. Unfortunately, only one man, King, actually arrived, and he was able to make two test flights before being forced to go home because of pressure from the British government.

Nevertheless, the Russian pilot Shirokov was still in Arabia, reportedly being paid £60 in gold coins per month plus a bottle of whisky each day. Flying several reconnaissance missions, Shirokov usually went up twice a day at morning and evening using the DH.9s. Because there were no proper bombs, Shirokov was encouraged by the Hijazi Army Commander, Tahsin Pasha, to drop small artillery shells and hand grenades on enemy concentrations around Mecca. The first test with two shells was a failure because the missiles did not explode.

A slightly different and more detailed account was once again provided by Colonel Ivanoff. In 1925, he told a correspondent of the London *Times* newspaper in Baghdad that King Ali Ibn Husayn had forbidden aerial attacks upon Mecca. Nevertheless, according to this newspaper report, the Russian received a written order from the Hijazi Minister of War, Tahsin Pasha, which read: "To *M. le pilot* Ivanoff: I hereby order you at 7 o'clock tomorrow morning to fly over Mecca, and to throw bombs and leaflets on the city. Before starting you must call at the office of Tahsin Pasha to obtain your flying orders." However, Ivanoff had already left the Hijaz, so presumably these written orders were actually sent to Shirokov or another unknown pilot.

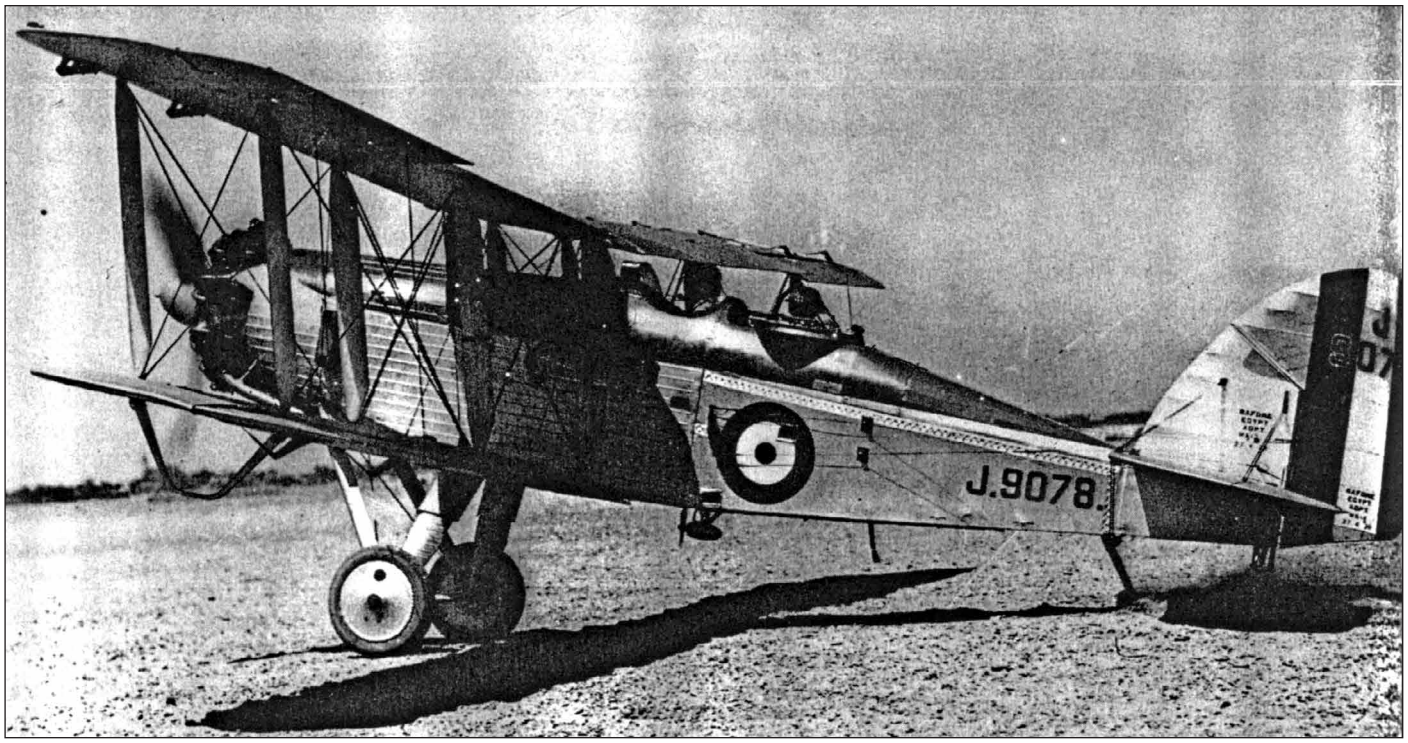
Another sortie against Saudi forces in Mecca was planned for 12 December, but was then cancelled. Instead, Shirokov was sent to bomb the enemy in Bahra on 18 December. No bombs were dropped because no enemy were seen, but these failures were followed by several observation flights and on 3 January 1925, bombs were dropped on the outskirts of Mecca. Militarily justified or otherwise, such sorties by an infidel Christian airman against Islam's holiest city did nothing to strengthen support for the Hashemite Kingdom of Hijaz in the wider Islamic world. On other occasions, propaganda leaflets were dropped.

Then on 18 January, Shirokov's de Havilland DH.9C was destroyed by an explosion on board the aircraft as it was flying over an enemy camp several kilometres from Jiddah. The Russian pilot and two Arab passengers – one of whom was the observer bomb-aimer while the other was a newspaperman – were killed. The exact reason for the explosion was never identified, but it was assumed that one of the locally made bombs consisting of artillery shells with timed fuses had gone off prematurely. Italian sources, based on the reports of those who had returned to Italy from Arabia, claimed that this accident happened on the ground, but Ivanoff stated that a grenade had exploded, resulting in the DH.9C falling from a height of over 1,200 metres.

With the Hashemite Kingdom of Hijaz now in a desperate situation, King Ali's brothers, King Faisal of Iraq and Amir Abdullah of Transjordan, sent money and men. However, such help had to come by sea from Aqaba in southern Transjordan, which proved painfully slow. The Hijazi Air Force's three remaining operational aircraft, one pilot and two mechanics were clearly not enough to make a significant difference. Consequently, five more machines were supposedly purchased from Italy, though they never arrived, along with munitions and vehicles from Germany. The German vehicles are sometimes said to have been 'tanks'.

Ivanoff again offered a more colourful, but probably brutally accurate, account of these purchases. He insisted that most of the equipment unloaded at Jiddah was "absolutely useless to the Army", and continued:

> Absurd prices were paid for ancient munitions, which in some cases had been lying rusting for years in ordnance dumps in different parts of Europe. They purchased 'tanks', the arrival of which was awaited with great impatience; but when they were received, they turned out to be merely old American motor



One of four Westland Wapiti II general purpose aircraft which would be sold to the Saudi Air Force late in 1929. It is seen here still with its original RAF markings and serial number (J9078) before going to Saudi Arabia at the start of 1930. (Author's collection)

> lorries which had been lying idle in Germany, without cover of any kind, since the (First World) war.

What is also clear is that King Ali's government was now seriously short of money. On 6 February, Saudi artillery bombarded Jiddah, and enemy forces, assisted by sympathetic local tribes, were now raiding within a few kilometres of the town. The story of King Ali's attempt to obtain equipment from Italy may have been confused with an attempt to purchase aeroplanes from Germany, where the firm of Steffen and Heyman of Berlin agreed to supply both aircraft and personnel. On 5 May 1925, a German pilot named Johannes Modler and an observer, D. Gerth, arrived in Jiddah. However, Modler left only five days later after taxiing one of the precious remaining de Havillands into a stone wall. He may have been the same man who subsequently returned to Jiddah in July, in company with four men who claimed to be pilots. One of them then crashed another Armstrong Whitworth after making a few flights, which left the Hijazi Air Force with one solitary operational aeroplane, a DH.9.

The following summer was clearly very difficult for the European mercenaries in Jiddah. According to Ivanoff, the climate was "very trying for the pilots and the five Russian mechanics who assisted them. The supplies of food and water were bad, and the airmen were asked to undertake long flights when they were suffering from fever, with high temperatures." Britain's withdrawal of support for the Hashemite Kingdom of Hijaz was also undermining morale and making things difficult for any Europeans seen in Jiddah. Ivanoff continued:

> In official quarters a hostile spirit was displayed towards Great Britain which was considered to be a friend of the Sultan of Najd [Abd al-Aziz Ibn Sa'ud]. This spirit was so strong that if any of the pilots was seen talking to the British Consul in Jeddah suspicions were immediately aroused, and at times they were openly accused of treachery.

Such an attitude was understandable, as the British were already supplying warplanes to the newly established Sa'udi air arm.

On 20 August 1925, Hashemite hopes were again raised by the arrival in Jiddah of the German steamship *RC Rickmers* of the Rickmers Line, carrying six reportedly reconditioned DH.9s with new Siddeley Puma engines. The cargo also included 12 Lewis machine guns, 120 cases of ammunition and 500 high-explosive and gas bombs. These new machines were assembled and made operational much more quickly than previous deliveries. They were also soon in action, flying reconnaissance and bombing missions almost daily. However, the German pilots were said to lack enthusiasm, and not surprisingly tried to avoid unnecessary risks.

Other reports maintain that a second order for British aircraft was placed but not completed. This may have been the same order that had reportedly been accepted by the Danish East Asiatic Company in June 1925 for six aircraft, said to be Avros constructed around 1920 and powered by 100hp Bristol Lucifer engines. They were to be shipped from Hamburg to Jiddah, but the British Foreign Office had now virtually abandoned its support for the Hashemite Kingdom of Hijaz and so persuaded the Danes to pull out of the deal.

The war nevertheless dragged on into December 1925, by which time Sa'udi forces had taken control of most of the Hijaz. Eventually, the civic leaders of Jiddah decided to surrender their city to Ibn Sa'ud, obliging King Ali to flee to Iraq by ship. The siege of Jiddah ended on 17 December; on the 19th, King Ali formally abdicated, and Abd al-Aziz Ibn Sa'ud proclaimed himself King of the Hijaz as well as Sultan of Najd on 8 January 1926. In 1926, these two entities became the dual Kingdom of Hijaz and Najd, which was in turn renamed the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932.

Back in 1902, the Amir Abd al-Aziz Ibn Sa'ud had established his capital at Riyadh, in the Najd region of central Arabia. While playing a very cautious role during the First World War, Ibn Sa'ud had used this period to extend his authority over more of the

Arabian Peninsula, after which he promoted himself to the status of Sultan of Najd 'and its dependencies' on 22 August 1921. This inevitably brought him into increased competition with his rival, the Hashemite King Husayn of the Hijaz in western Arabia.

Meanwhile, Italy, as an ambitious colonial power, felt itself to be in competition with both Britain and France. The feeling of being unfairly overshadowed by greater colonial powers grew stronger after Benito Mussolini came to power in Rome in 1922. Thereafter, Fascist Italy saw an opportunity of aligning itself with a rising sense of Arab nationalism in countries already under British and French rule, though not, of course, within its own troubled colony of Libya. Although little would come of this new policy until the Second World War, Italy nevertheless looked for friends in various Arab countries, thus providing fertile ground for some Arab leaders to play one colonial power off against another.

Even before Ibn Sa'ud defeated King Ali of the Hijaz, he had set about establishing a Saudi air force in 1923. It was to be called the Al-Sa'ud Air Arm and its role would be entirely traditional; namely to support ground forces and threaten dissident tribesmen. The first aeroplanes to be acquired were a handful of ex-RAF de Havilland DH.9 bombers, soon followed by four ex-RAF Westland Wapitis. Meanwhile, an aerodrome was established at Dhahran, manned by British pilots and technicians.

After the collapse of the Hashemite Kingdom of Hijaz and the Sa'udi occupation of Jiddah in 1925, workshops were also established at Dhahran, where there were reportedly now five aeroplanes in poor or very poor condition. Initially, Ibn Sa'ud wanted all captured military equipment, including the Hijazi aeroplanes, to be moved to Taif, where he hoped to use them for a civilian airmail postal service operated by a British pilot and one mechanic.

The British government's concern about what it termed 'native air forces' in the Middle East led to considerable correspondence within and between the Foreign Office, War Office and Air Ministry during this period. Sir Hugh Trenchard, the Chief of the Air Staff, was strongly opposed to the emergence of such air forces. However, most attention was focussed upon the ambitions of Egypt, Iraq and Persia (Iran), with rather less internal British government correspondence dealing with 'Ibn Saud's Air Force'.

Nevertheless, one such official memo was sent to Trenchard on 6 April 1926. It pointed out that this was a political as well as a military question:

> [Y]ou will realise that there is an essential difference between a mandated territory like Irak [Iraq], where British forces are maintained, and an entirely independent country such as Ibn Saud's combined kingdom of Hejaz [Hijaz] and Nejd [Najd], where we cannot and do not wish to assume political control. Egypt, again although nominally independent, is actually subject to the control of a British army of occupation … While, therefore, we are in a position to refuse to allow the Governments of Egypt and Irak to establish their own air forces, we are not in a position to forbid Ibn Saud to use the aeroplanes which he has got in any way in which he sees fit, either for civil or military purposes. With Ibn Saud, it is, therefore, a case of our either exercising what influence we can by supplying him with British personnel to operate his air force, or letting him find such personnel from other European countries such as Italy or France. I think you will agree that the former course is the lesser of the two evils.

A British representative went to see Ibn Sa'ud on 3 May 1926 and was told that spare parts as well as personnel were required to make these old machines serviceable. The British Air Ministry then sent Squadron Leader Noakes and two RAF mechanics to look at what remained of the ex-Hashemite Air Force. It has been suggested that Noakes was also given secret orders, not only to get as much information as possible but also to undermine the whole idea of a Sa'udi Air Force. This latter failed, though it may have been as a result of Noakes' report that Britain offered no further help to the Sa'udis until 1929.

During the autumn of 1927, three Germans decided to see what they might do in what had been renamed the Kingdom of the Hijaz and Najd and its Dependencies. They were a pilot named Blume, another man called Steffan and a representative of the newly established Deutsche Luft Hansa airline, who wanted the Sa'udi government to establish an early form of air traffic control system. Things progressed slowly, but in June 1928 a four-man special commission was set up to study what use might be made of the Hijazi aeroplanes. The latter still theoretically formed a Hijazi Air Force within the dual Kingdoms of Najd and Hijaz. One of its members was a retired German pilot who was currently running an ice-manufacturing plant in the Kingdoms of Najd and Hijaz (Saudi Arabia).

Rather surprisingly, one of the old DH.9s, which had been languishing in their hangers, was found to be airworthy enough for the German pilot to make a test flight over Jiddah. Clearly impressed, the Saudi authorities hired him as the 'head of the aerodrome' in August 1928, after he flew from Jiddah to and from the ex-British RFC and RAF airfield at Rabigh (see Volume Two). The following September, the German pilot again flew this aeroplane about 640km to al-Wijh, in what is believed to have been the longest flight so far made by a Hijazi aeroplane.

The first four Westland Wapitis supplied to the Saudi Air Force at the start of 1929. They were numbered S1 to S4, with these serials being applied beneath the wings, on the rear fuselages and on the rudders. (Royal Saudi Air Force Museum archive)

An ex-RAF Westland Wapiti II after its sale to the Saudi Air Force. It is seen shortly after being transferred from British stocks in neighbouring Iraq. The British personnel may have been the four pilots contracted by the Saudi government: I.M. Morris, L.S. Hamilton, F.E. North and C.L. Lowe. (Royal Saudi Air Force Museum)

In 1929, Abd al-Aziz Ibn Sa'ud decided that his country must have a proper, modern air force, and thus resolved to get both machines and aircrew from the United Kingdom. This resulted in an order for what was described as a 'complete air force' being made via the British government. The intention was for four aeroplanes to be delivered very quickly. Meanwhile, Wing Commander F.W. Stent led a British Air Mission to Saudi Arabia in June, consisting of himself and four airmen from the RAF depot at Abu Qir in Egypt. Its first task was to look at the condition of the DH.9s already in the country, as well as the workshops at Dhahran. Two of the DH.9s proved to be airworthy and were flown several times by members of the British Air Mission before these men returned to Abu Qir on 3 July 1929.

A few weeks later, on 25 August, Britain agreed to deliver four Westland Wapiti II general purpose aeroplanes, powered by Bristol Jupiter VI engines. They were either Mk I machines like those earlier supplied to the Hijazi Air Force, some of which were still in Saudi service, or were early production Mk II models. These could be supplied from RAF stocks in neighbouring Iraq, along with one spare engine, four tented hangers and a thousand 20lb bombs. The deal was arranged through a British Colonial Office intelligence agent, the Arabist scholar and explorer Harry St John Bridger Philby (whose son Kim Philby later gained infamy as a British spy who operated as a double-agent for the Soviet Union). In October 1929, a team of British specialists was contracted to work on the Saudi Wapitis. They were pilots I.M. Morris (who was appointed Chief Pilot), L.S. Hamilton, F.E. North and C.L. Lowe, plus mechanics J.G. Cairns, G. Cleal, W.J. Gribble, W.G. Howard, W. Thorpe and R.W. Pierce, though the latter seems not to have actually gone to Saudi Arabia.

These men left London on 15 November, while the Wapitis flew from Iraq to Darin, on Tarut Island on Saudi Arabia's Gulf coast, on 4 January 1930. Darin was to be the Saudi Air Force's new base. In British eyes, the new force was, according to a Foreign Office internal memo, "to form the nucleus of an air force … and should enable Ibn Saud to exercise better control over the frontier tribes and check their raiding tendencies". The British in Iraq certainly hoped this would be the case, because tribal raiders, usually acting on behalf of Ibn Sa'ud's fundamentalist Wahabi supporters – though not necessarily with Ibn Sa'ud's direct approval – had been a headache for the British mandate authorities for years. The few available photographs show that at least one Westland Wapiti had the serial number S9 or S5 written beneath its lower wing.

However, relations between the British and their Saudi employers were not always happy. Abd al-Aziz Ibn Sa'ud complained that he was being overcharged for their services, while the British found it difficult – if not impossible – to abide by Saudi Arabia's fearsomely strict no-alcohol laws. The Saudis also found some other aspects of European behaviour objectionable. Living conditions on isolated Tarut Island were difficult, but the air base had been placed there for several reasons, not least a desire to keep Europeans away from most of the local population. This location also made it easier to protect the aeroplanes and other equipment from pilfering by tribesmen. There were nevertheless occasional diversions, as when the tail skid of one aeroplane ploughed up an ancient tomb.

Pilot L.S. Hamilton was dismissed on 20 May 1931, for reasons which seem unrecorded, but work otherwise progressed satisfactorily. Then, on 1 July, much to the men's relief, the Saudi Air Force was ordered to move back to Jiddah on the Red Sea coast, where they were well received by a small resident European community. Another RAF pilot was soon loaned to the Saudis to replace Hamilton, and in August the aeroplanes were flown to the RAF airbase of Shaibah in southern Iraq. From there they went on to the main RAF depot in Iraq at Hinaidi on 23 August, escorted by three RAF machines.

The Wapitis were then given a thorough overhaul and refit. When this was complete, the aircraft left RAF Hinaidi on 5 September, flown by Morris, North, Lowe and Flight Lieutenant Pearson, who had been loaned by the RAF. After flying west, they landed at Amman in Transjordan, then headed south via Ma'an, arriving in Jiddah nine days later. On 18 September, Morris, North and Lowe, as pilots of the Saudi Air Force – but not Pearson, who was merely on loan from the RAF – were formally welcomed by King Abdul Aziz Ibn Sa'ud.

The following months saw improvements being made to Jiddah aerodrome and its facilities, especially to the old and battered canvas hangers, while the three old DH.9s were repaired. Furthermore, Morris, as Chief Pilot, set about establishing a school of aeronautics, with the intention of training six Arab pilots, plus 12 riggers and 12 fitters recruited from the limited pool of local technicians. November 1930 had seen the creation of an Arab Aeronautical Society in the Saudi kingdom, to promote aviation and collect funds for further equipment. The revived air force seemed to have got off to a good start, but in February 1931

the last four British mechanics resigned, followed by pilots Morris and North early in April, which only left Lowe.

Around this time, a German pilot named Kurt Krakowsky and an unnamed German mechanic were hired to help the lonely Lowe. However, the German mechanic also soon left, and in June 1931 Ibn Sa'ud demanded that British pilots be replaced by other men at lower salaries, although Lowe was briefly re-engaged on 24 August. The Saudi king next insisted that six local men from the Hijaz region be taught to fly in England, presumably having heard that both Iraq and Egypt were selecting young army officers for their own future air forces. However, the British were reluctant to agree to this; the Air Ministry in London suggesting to the Foreign Office that more should be learned about what the Saudi ruler actually intended for his air force. One of their memos stated: "For example, to undertake the training of six Hijazi pilots now, without making any provision for the training of a suitable number of mechanics would be a most impractical and short-sighted policy."

Even if the British did agree to the Saudi monarch's proposal, where would these men be trained? The Air Ministry maintained that it would be "more suitable for them to be trained at the RAF School in Egypt. Also the language difficulty should be made very clear, especially in regard to the training of pilots, as the services of an interpreter would not overcome the difficulty during training in the air. As a first step it might be desirable to have selected personnel taught English." The British High Commissioner in Egypt countered by suggesting that although "Egypt would be a more suitable place than England for the training of Arabic speaking officers, the fact that there is more talk than ever today of 'Pan-Islamic Movements' and the 'Arab Union' makes it incontestable that from the political point of view England would be a healthier training ground".

While this was going on, a different set of problems arose concerning precisely to whom any contracted British aircrew would be answerable. The British authorities insisted that such men could not be used in war, to which the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs countered by pointing out that the Saudi monarch had already made the following clear:

> [W]e did not buy the aeroplanes with the intention of warring against anyone … we bought them for operations against those of our own subjects who disobeyed us and secondly to repulse any move that anyone might make against us. But we have not been able to profit from the aeroplanes in the time of need … Let the British government choose one of two courses, either to send us airmen and mechanics or engineers sufficient for four aeroplanes and let them be under our authority for every purpose, or else send us engineers and instructors and we will ourselves look for airmen other than English, and the English will be for training and the others for war.

Still wanting the Saudi government to accept the British point of view, the British government rejected this suggestion. Thus, the British pilots' contracts were terminated and they were paid off in July 1931, though the Saudis justified their abrupt act by blaming a shortage of money. During ongoing problems with the Idrisid Amirate of Asir, which lay between Hijaz and Yemen, the Saudi Air Force was ordered to fly over Jizan to boost the morale of Saudi troops in the area. However, C.L. Lowe was unwell and decided not to take off. Instead, a young and sadly unnamed Syrian pilot, who was unfairly described as an "adventurer" by his European colleagues, was ordered to take his place.

This interesting and mysterious individual had also been recruited as a pilot, but unfortunately the Syrian flier had never flown a Wapiti. Unsurprisingly, he refused to take off on a combat mission in a completely unfamiliar aeroplane. Unlike the British pilot Lowe, who could disobey orders with impunity, the young Syrian was reportedly disciplined for insubordination. Western sources claim that he was briefly imprisoned and supposedly even beaten, which sounds unlikely. As yet, nothing more is known about the Syrian pilot, but, given the French mandate authorities' reluctance to encourage Syrians – or even Christian Lebanese – to learn to fly, it is possible that he was one of a handful of young men from the Syrian provinces of the Ottoman Empire trained as aircrew during the First World War. However, Turkish records list these men only as observers or trainee observers rather than pilots (see Volume One).

This left the German mercenary Krakowsky, who was ill with dysentery, and he was either persuaded or more likely forced by the general in command of the Saudi Army in Hijaz to fly this mission. Krakowsky took to the air before turning back after a few minutes. As he made his final approach, he shut off the engine, then fainted while still airborne, causing the Wapiti to glide into the nearby lagoon, where it crashed, though Krakowsky survived. Lowe left Saudi Arabia for the last time on 20 September. The British pilots were not replaced, and for the next three years the Saudi Air Force effectively ceased to operate, which suggests that King Ibn Sa'ud had been disappointed by the whole episode.

In January 1932, the Kingdom of Hijaz and Nejd reported to the international Disarmament Conference in Geneva that what was still called the Hijaz Air Force currently had nine aeroplanes, 11 officers and 150 men. Two Wapitis were reportedly serviceable and two unserviceable, while the five surviving DH.9s were no longer considered worth repairing. An Australian flying officer named Garth E. Klein had apparently been hired to take charge of the air force, but never arrived. Later that year, a group of educated Hijazis – self-proclaimed 'liberals' – sought refuge in Yemen and were accused of starting to plan a coup with the intention of expelling the Saudi king from the Hijaz. This prompted Abd al-Aziz Ibn Sa'ud to seek British support, and the latter agreed to send both ammunition and aeroplanes.

More significantly, Fu'ad Hamza, Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs in the (Saudi) Kingdom of Hijaz, made an official visit to Italy in 1932. Here, he expressed an interest in sending Saudi military cadets to the Italian Air Force Academy in Caserta. In July, the Italian Air Minister and pioneer long-distance pilot, Italo Balbo, offered to train Saudi aircrew, but this was not followed up. Instead, the first overseas training mission was supposed to go to Muslim Turkey, apparently because of "a greater ease of language and similarity of habits". This plan also came to nothing, as did the idea of recruiting flying instructors from neighbouring Arab countries where there were retired ex-Ottoman aircrew and more recently qualified civilian pilots. Perhaps the unnamed Syrian 'adventurer' who had been recruited as a pilot was one of these men.

Meanwhile, according to various reports in the Egyptian press, what became Saudi Arabia hoped to set up its own flying school to be staffed by foreign personnel. Some young Saudis were not willing to wait, and on 21 September 1932, one of them was killed in a flying accident at the Gino Lisa Flying Club outside Turin. The day after this student's death, the dual monarchy of Najd and

Hijaz was formally united as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which would continue to be ruled by Abd al-Aziz Ibn Sa'ud until his death in 1953.

British attempts to link the provision of trained personnel for the Saudi Air Force with overflying rights for British aeroplanes, both civil and military, also backfired. In 1933, the last agreement with Britain was terminated. Saudi Arabia had preserved its political independence from a domineering British Empire, but in so doing it missed an opportunity to develop a soundly based air force like those now emerging under British guidance – and domination – in Iraq and Egypt.

A British consular official reported late in 1933 that the anticipated arrival of a civilian aircraft from Egypt "will be the first machine of any kind to fly in or near the Hijaz since the ill-fated Wapiti crash" (when Kurt Krakowsky was forced from his sickbed and ended up in the lagoon near Jiddah). He continued:

> Its arrival may serve to focus local attention on the parlous condition of the Saudi Air Force. The latter still consists of the four Wapitis and five old DH9s bought from His Majesty's [British] government; but the former, which alone might be made to fly, still remain, as they have remained since the time of the crash referred to above, in their ramshackle hangar, with absolutely no attention except an occasional greasing by an inexpert hand; while Ibn Saud remains without a single pilot capable of flying the machines and without a single competent air-mechanic. No attempt has been made to develop any ground organisation, and projects, which have been reported on various occasions from this post, of engaging Turkish pilots and/or training Saudi subjects in Turkey, have remained unrealised.
>
> …
>
> There has been no material change in the equipment or personnel of the force. The aircraft taken over from the Hashemite regime can be dismissed as completely valueless. Two certainly, and possibly one other, of the Wapitis bought under the auspices of HMG [His Majesty's Government] in 1929–30, are in working condition. I have heard lately of some idea of attempting to recondition the fourth, which crashed in the lagoon just north of Jiddah in September 1931, but I doubt the feasibility of this.

Meanwhile, it seems that thought was still being given to the possibility of Italy offering a solution. For Italy, the threat of a war with Ethiopia, which did actually erupt in October 1935, made Mussolini's government nervous about the vulnerability of its maritime communications in the Red Sea, especially if the British Empire managed to forge any form of alliance with Saudi Arabia. It was vital for Rome that both Saudi Arabia and Yemen remained independent and did not become British client states. According to an Italian diplomatic report from the Hijaz in March 1934, there were now only four British-built aeroplanes in the country, presumably the Wapitis, all in poor condition and lacking any technical support.

In the meantime, the only pilots readily available to Ibn Saud were Russian refugees who had fled from the Soviet Union – the same pool of men who had previously provided the Hashemite Kingdom of Hijaz with most of its aircrew. On 3 June, Russian pilot Nikolai Naidenov and mechanic Maximov returned to Jiddah, having been asked to revive the grounded Saudi Air Force. They arrived from Egypt and found three Westland Wapitis (rather than the four reported by the Italians three months earlier) in reasonable condition but lacking tyres. They promptly ordered the necessary spare parts and, after repairing one aeroplane, took it up for a first test flight on 2 July. Unfortunately, three days later, Naidenov struck a low wall while landing and overturned the Wapiti. On 31 July, he flew a second machine, and as soon as two aeroplanes were serviceable, the 'headquarters' of the entire Saudi Air Force moved to Taif. On 18 November 1934 two more Russians – a pilot and a mechanic named L. Kouchlavsky and V. Makovetsky – were also signed up.

That same month, a representative of the Misr Airwork Company in Egypt went to Saudi Arabia with a proposal to supply the country with modern aircraft. This was followed in December by the arrival of one of Misr Airwork's British pilots, G.S. Brown, flying a de Havilland DH.84 Dragon. According to some sources, he was accompanied by Muhammad Sidqi, who was flying a de Havilland DH.83 Fox Moth, two of which were on the Egyptian civil register around this time (SU-ABA and SU-ABG), though neither seems to have belonged to Misr Airwork. However, Tarek Sidki states that according to his grandfather's logbook, Muhammad Sidqi did not fly to Saudi Arabia until 1936.

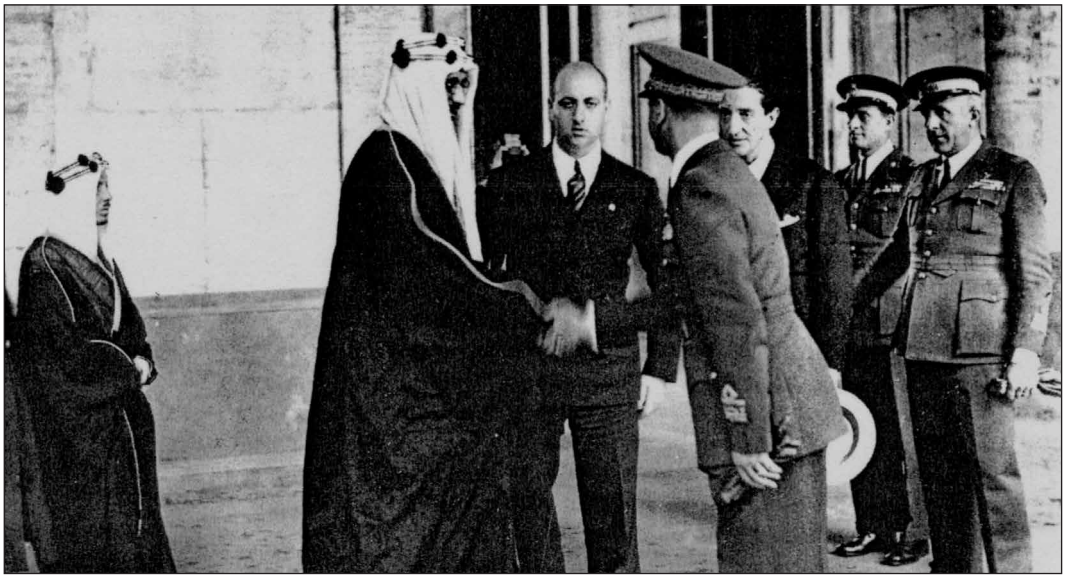
Misr Airwork had been set up on 31 December 1931 with exclusive rights to undertake air transport operations, and was based at Almaza aerodrome outside Cairo (see Chapter Seven). Its founder was Alan Muntz, who had also been a co-founder of the British company Airwork in 1928, with its headquarters at Heston aerodrome near London. Muntz was now the chairman of Misr Airwork. Furthermore, he soon developed a close training association with the RAF; in reality, the Misr Airwork enterprise was not entirely independent of what might be called 'the British establishment'.

By this time there was also at least one other aeroplane operating in Saudi Arabia, a Fairchild Model 71 (c.n. 801, US civil registration 13902) belonging to the California Arabian Standard Oil Company (ancestor of today's Saudi Aramco Oil Company). This machine had been based in al-Hasa since 1934. Geologists from the American oil company working in Saudi Arabia since the second half of 1933 had quickly realised that an aeroplane would greatly assist their work. For that reason, the Fairchild Model 71 – with balloon tyres to cope with sandy desert airstrips, aerial photography equipment and an additional fuel tank – was sent to the country. After being shipped to Egypt from New York, it was then flown from Alexandria, via Iraq, to Jubail in Saudi Arabia in April. Dick Kerr, who also worked as a geologist and photographer, and co-pilot Charlie Rocheville then began the mammoth task of mapping a substantial corner of the Arabian Peninsula.

After so many false starts, the first group of 14 Saudi officers left for Italy on 2 February 1935 to be trained as aircrew. Only four passed the medical tests, so another six were selected and sent off some time later. Meanwhile, the Arab Aeronautical Society had been collecting funds for the promotion of aviation in Saudi Arabia while also trying to purchase two trainer aeroplanes. Meanwhile, another special subscription had been started to finance the purchase of three further aircraft, to be named *Mecca*, *Jiddah* and *Riyadh*, but all these plans came to nothing.

The story of the Saudi flying cadets in Italy is one of high ambition and a clash of cultures, as well as a remarkable degree of success, at least in the short term. The first group of trainees all held the rank of second lieutenant, without which they would not be accepted by the Italian Central Flying School in Grottaglie near Taranto. Their travel and maintenance costs, as well as payment for

Prince Sa'ud Ibn Abd al-Aziz, heir to the Saudi crown, with some of the 10 Saudi Air Force student pilots currently learning to fly in Italy, at the Air Ministry in Rome in May 1935. (Stato Maggiore Aeronautica archive)



Prince Sa'ud Ibn Abd al-Aziz meeting Brigadier General F. Poro, the Director General of the Regia Aeronautica's Equipment and Airfields, at the Italian Air Ministry in Rome in May 1935. (Stato Maggiore Aeronautica archive)

the training courses, were to be financed by the Saudi government at a total of 50,000 lire.

The Italian Central Flying School consisted of four flying units, the first of which had low-powered Breda 25 two-seater trainers. For the Saudis' special course, however, this unit was provided with several Caproni Ca.100 primary trainers with Fiat A.50 radial engines. Very little information survives about the Saudis' syllabus, though it probably followed normal Italian procedures with modifications reflecting the Saudis' aptitudes. The first four Saudi students arrived on 7 March 1935, with the next six arriving on 20 April. Each would fly 185 hours, including three solo flights.

Back in Saudi Arabia, according to the not entirely sympathetic British Consul in Jiddah, the local Arabic press occasionally published what he described as "optimistic accounts of the progress of the Saudi student-aviators … Private information is less glowing." After completing their flying training at Grottaglie, the 10 students took a course at the Malpensa Bombing School, where they also studied navigation. Eight returned home on 4 April, while the remaining two arrived back on 31 May.

Of these Italian-trained pilots, Abdullah Mandili was singled out as being the best, and three years later he would be sent to Britain for a civil aviation course. According to the British Consul in Jiddah, after returning to Saudi Arabia – where the local press referred to them as "our eagles" – these young men were more keen on enjoying their status as foreign-trained airmen than maintaining their flying skills. In the consul's words:

> The belief that the Saudi 'eagles' trained in Italy would be less likely to cleave the empyrean with bright wing than to make a mess in the eyrie is confirmed from no less an important person than Said Bey al-Kurdi, [the Saudi] Commandant of Jeddah. During a courtesy visit which was paid to him by Commander Bowen of HMS *Weston* [a British naval sloop], the conversation turned to aviation, which Said Bey said would be of the greatest use to Saudi Arabia, both for ordinary administration purposes and as a means of controlling the tribes. He then broke out into a violent tirade, which, although nominally against all young Arabs educated abroad, was obviously aimed at the newly-returned 'eagles'. Such people, he said, were good for nothing but to live a life of luxury and try to teach their grandmothers to suck eggs … They expected pay, food, clothes and servants on European scales, but to work as men work in Europe was the last thing they would do.

Perhaps fearing a future Italian monopoly of influence in Saudi Arabian aviation, the French government presented King Abd al-Aziz Ibn Sa'ud with a four-seater Caudron C510 Pelican (c.n. 7326/36, French civil registration F-AONS) in spring 1935. This high-wing cabin monoplane was an air ambulance refitted as a VIP transport, and was capable of carrying three passengers in comfort. Having been flown from France via French territories in North Africa by Colonel Pitault, the Caudron C510 Pelican arrived on 25 March. On the 28th, some of Ibn Sa'ud's reportedly 25 sons and even larger number of grandsons were taken up for short flights, though the king showed no interest in joining them.

In May 1935, the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Italy moved up a gear when Prince Sa'ud Ibn Abd al-Aziz, heir to the

Saudi crown, made an official visit to Rome. There, he went to the Air Ministry before inspecting a number of Italian Air Force installations. He also met the 10 young Saudi pilots who were currently training in Italy: Abd al-Kadir Zin, Amin Shakir, Tarabzanli Sadaka, Salih Alim, Abd al-Kadir Kamil, Hamsa Tarabzoni, Abdullah Mandili, Sa'id Basha Garia, Khalid Dia al-Din and Salih Abd al-Karim. On 2 June 1935, the last of these, Salih Abd al-Karim, was considered ready to fly solo, but he made such a basic error that his instructor was astonished. Nevertheless, the resulting investigation declared that young Salih was not to blame.

Some of the first Saudi Arabian Air Force cadets with their instructors in Italy in 1935. (Royal Saudi Air Force Museum archive)

Two days later, the first batch of Saudi students were sent to the Malpensa Bombing School, where they continued training, this time on Ansaldo A.300/6 light bombers. They would be followed to Malpensa by a second group of Saudi students on 19 September. From there, each group was sent to Aviano and Foggia to complete their courses.

Italy invaded Abyssinia (Ethiopia) on 3 October 1935 (the Second Italo-Ethiopian War), resulting in an Italian occupation of the country by 1939. During this conflict, Saudi Arabia remained strictly neutral and refused to enforce anti-Italian sanctions demanded by the League of Nations. This inaction was probably because of ongoing Italian help in building the Saudi Air Force plus an Italian donation of some military equipment to Saudi Arabia, previously requested in August 1935. The equipment was apparently given in return for very large numbers of transport camels sent to the Italian Army in East Africa. The deal was said to include 10,000 rifles with 10 million rounds of ammunition, supposedly destined for an Arab uprising against the British in Palestine. These guns and bullets never arrived, leading to anti-Italian feeling which the British were quick to exploit. It is also worth noting that the Saudi approach to the Abyssinian Crisis was in stark contrast to the profoundly anti-Italian reaction of the Egyptian government and people.

Prince Sa'ud Ibn Abd al-Aziz visiting Ciampino airfield outside Rome in May 1935, in company with several senior Regia Aeronautica officers. (Stato Maggiore Aeronautica archive)

Meanwhile, the Saudi flying students continued training in Italy. On 14 January 1936, two of them – Salih Alim and Sadaka Tarabzanli – were sent to the 31st Maritime Bombing Stormo to attend a month-long basic air navigation course. Early in February, nine more Saudi students arrived in Italy, and over the next four weeks they studied the theory and practice of instrumental navigation, as well as the administration of airfields and operational air units, at Orbetello. This course was considered highly prestigious because the unit involved, commanded by Colonel Alberto Briganti, had evolved from the 'Atlantic Squadron' which Italo Balbo had led during its famous squadron-strength crossings of the South and North Atlantic between 1930 and 1933. However, one of the Saudi students, Khalid Dia al-Din, failed to qualify as a military pilot on this occasion. Upset, and perhaps also humiliated by his failure, Khalid persuaded the Italian Air Ministry to send him on a further course at the *Reggia Aeronautica*'s flying school at Capua. His colleague Salih Abdul Karim would also be sent to Capua rather than completing his pilot training, though to the School of Technical Training. There he remained throughout early May, apparently because the Saudi government wanted to put Salih Abdul Karim in command of their new air force's technical division.

The other Saudi pilots returned home, landing at Jiddah on 4 April 1936 to be greeted not only by Saudi government representative and local dignitaries, but a crowd of young Saudis who hailed them as heroes. Their two colleagues returned a short while later. According to Italian sources, the uniform worn by these new Saudi pilot officers was essentially the same as that worn by Italian officers serving in the colonies, though with traditional

Arab *kafiya* and *agal* headgear, Saudi Army rank insignia and what was described as "the occasional green sash".

As expected, and perhaps also prompted, the Saudi pilots announced that they only wanted to fly Italian-built machines. Just under three weeks later, the Italian government decided to give Saudi Arabia three Caproni Ca.100 trainers and three Ca.101bis transports, free of charge and reportedly with no conditions attached. Clearly, Italy was eager to maintain good relations with the only Arab country willing to accept the Fascist invasion of nearby Ethiopia. The story of the Saudi Caproni Ca.100s has been researched in detail by Gregory Alegi in *Ali sul Deserto* (Rome: 1994).

The Italian government entrusted Lieutenant Colonel Giovanni Tavazzani with this task. So, with the assumed name of 'Accountant Giovanni Scuri' and authority to use his own discretion – even to donate aeroplanes as gifts if necessary – Tavazzani arrived at Jiddah on 8 March 1936. Tavazzani already knew King Abd al-Aziz's second son, and on 26 March he telegraphed the Italian Air Ministry to inform them that he had persuaded the Saudi government to purchase 10 aircraft at prices yet to be agreed. These were to be five bombers which could also be used as civilian transports, three trainers and two other transports, preferably supplied from Italian stocks in Eritrea.

Rome agreed within four days, but pointed out that the machines could not come from Eritrea because all were needed for the current war effort. The types of aeroplane also had be agreed. A full report was received from Lieutenant Colonel Tavazzani on 5 April, and less than three weeks later, the Italian government decided to unconditionally donate three Caproni Ca.100 trainers and three Ca.101bis tri-motor transports to Saudi Arabia. The following day, the Italian Foreign Ministry asked what insignia should be painted on the rudders of these machines, whereupon they were told that King Abd al-Aziz Ibn Sa'ud wanted "*una spada trasversale in bianco su fondo verde*". The word *bianco* was perhaps an error for *blanco*, the reply therefore meaning "a diagonal sword in white on a green background". No complete photograph of this first Saudi Air Force insignia is known to the author, but the brief instructions suggest something different from the insignia subsequently adopted by the Royal Saudi Arabian Air Force (RSAAF). There was no mention of an Arabic inscription, and the sword was described as diagonal, rather than horizontal as it later appeared.

Early in May 1936, the cargo ship *Vòlpi* steamed out of Naples harbour, bound for Massawa in Eritrea. Built in 1931, the *Vòlpi* would eventually be scuttled at Phuket in Thailand in December 1941, to prevent it falling into British hands. On this voyage, however, its cargo included the three Caproni Ca.100 biplanes. Although the Saudi student pilots had trained on Fiat A.50 radial engine versions of the Ca.100, or Caproncino as it was affectionately known, the only known photographs of Ca.100s in Saudi service show them to have been of the standard Colombo S.63 in-line engine version.

On 15 May, Salvatore Arzillo and Mario Mazzi, sergeant air mechanics of the Italian Air Force, also set off for Saudi Arabia, officially travelling as employees of the Caproni company. Just over two weeks later, Lieutenant Colonel Carlo Tempesti, the leader of the Italian Military Mission in Saudi Arabia, arrived back in Rome, the victim of a serious infection. Despite having spent relatively little time in Arabia, Tempesti had studied the layout of the aerodrome outside Jiddah, had started the organisation of an air route from Jiddah to the Persian Gulf coast via Taif and Riyadh,

Capt. Giovanni Battista Ciccu next to one of the first Caproni Ca.100 "Caproncinos" to be delivered to the Royal Saudi Arabian Air Force in 1936. (G.B. Ciccu photo)

and had convinced the Saudi authorities that future Saudi cadets should be trained in Italy rather than the Middle East.

Tempesti's replacement was Captain Giovanni Battista Ciccu, who had been the Saudi students' instructor at the Malpensa Bombing School. For the purposes of his journey to Saudi Arabia, Ciccu was listed as a commercial flying instructor, and, having arrived in Jiddah on 12 June, he set to work at once. Only five days later, he took off at eight in the morning – despite strong winds – to test the first of the newly assembled Ca.100 trainers. The following day, Ciccu was asked to take command of the new Saudi Aviation School, established by royal decree on 18 June. The school was soon a busy place, and a little over a month later it was visited by the heir to the throne, Prince Faisal, with his aide-de-camp, Colonel Hamdi. The future ruler of Saudi Arabia was not only keen to fly but hoped himself to become a qualified pilot.

Now released from the previously intrusive attention of the military governor of Jiddah, Major Said al-Kurdi, Ciccu replaced the White Russian pilot Nikolaj Najdenov, who, with the assistance of three émigré Russian mechanics, had for several years run what remained of the Saudi Air Force. Under Captain Ciccu's direction, the first flights over the sacred town of Mecca by Saudi pilots were made on 21 and 22 August 1936, leaflets being dropped from the Caproni Ca.100s. The leaflets urged people to support aviation and were signed by pilot Salih Alim. On the last

Saudi Arabia's first qualified military pilots with a Caproni Ca.100. This version of the Ca.100 has an in-line engine and is presumably one of the three supplied to the Saudi Air Force at the end of May 1936. The other men are probably members of an Italian advisory mission attached to the Saudi Air Force. (Royal Saudi Air Force Museum archive)

day of August, there were celebrations to mark this significant step forward for Saudi Arabia, although no mention was made of an accident the previous day when one of the country's three Ca.100s crashed in a low-level stall at Taif. Pilot Khalid al-Din Dia, who had previously needed to attend a further course before gaining his pilot's wings, escaped serious injury, but the aeroplane, identified by its original Italian Regia Aeronautica military serial MM.56194, was sufficiently damaged to need major repairs in Italian workshops, being shipped to Eritrea in November to be repaired by the Regia Aeronautica at Asmara. However, Saudi Arabia's long-awaited three-engined Caproni Ca.101bis did not arrive until later in 1936 (see Volume Five).

5
YEMEN'S FORGOTTEN FLIERS

If the early years of the Saudi Arabian Air Force are little known, the story of Yemen's attempt to establish an air force between the First and Second World Wars is even more obscure.

On 30 October 1918, the Imam Yahya Muhammad reportedly declared Yemen (Northern Yemen) to be an independent state. That was the very day on which the Ottoman Empire accepted Allied terms and signed the Armistice of Mudros. Given the primitive state of communications in Yemen at the time, it seems likely that such a declaration was backdated, having actually been made subsequently, after news of the Ottoman surrender reached Yemen two weeks later. Nevertheless, it can be argued that Yemen was the first former Ottoman territory in the Arab world to become an independent state, despite the fact that Imam Yahya continued to recognise the spiritual suzerainty of the Ottoman Sultan-Caliph.

A more plausible version of this tumultuous time states that news of the ceasefire between the Ottoman Empire and its foes actually reached Imam Yahya on 14 November 1918. Three days after that, the Yemeni leader went to Sana'a to attend a gathering of the most powerful and influential leaders from the Hashid, Arhab, Nihm and Khuwlan tribes. They met in the house of Husayn Ali al-Amri, a noted religious scholar and judge. It was here that the Imam Yahya Muhammad Hamid al-Din was declared ruler of the entire country, not merely sovereign of the Zaidi Shi'a Muslim population.

However, being proclaimed ruler was one thing; really controlling the country was quite another. First, Imam Yahya had to secure the Yemeni capital, the walled city of Sana'a. Sentries were posted at all the gates and men were forbidden to enter the city with firearms – a radical step in Yemeni culture of that time. Thereafter, the Imam's authority spread to other cities such as Mukha (Mocha) and Ta'iz, as well as to much, though not all, of the rest of Yemen.

In early December 1918, the distant Ottoman government announced that it would have to withdraw all its forces from Yemen, and that the Ifranj (or 'Frankish infidels') were going to take over what had been the Ottoman Empire. In this crisis, Imam Yahya sent troops to defend the western approaches to Sana'a, in expectation of a British thrust up from the Red Sea coast. Meanwhile, he himself hurried back to the city. Imam Yahya also asked the existing Ottoman civil servants and military men to stay in the country to help him, a large number doing so.

For example, part of the Ottoman Autonomous VII Corps commanded by Ali Sa'id Pasha, which was still at Lahij near Aden, split into two parts, while its local Yemeni levies and volunteers returned to their homes. Ali Sa'id Pasha himself, along with just over half his troops, surrendered to the British and were repatriated to Turkey. The rest, including some officers and most of the corps'

This is believed to be one of very few photographs of Yahya Muhammad Hamid al-Din al-Mutawakkil, Imam of Yemen, early in his reign or perhaps earlier when Yemen was still under Ottoman rule. (Author's collection)

weaponry including artillery, joined the Imam Yahya. Around 500 Turkish and largely Syrian Arab soldiers at the port of Hudaydah did the same, bringing with them sufficient equipment for half a division. In Sana'a itself, virtually the entire Ottoman garrison transferred their allegiance to the Imam, including Mahmud Nadim Pasha, the Wali or civil governor who had been a former military governor of Yemen. Mahmud Nadim Pasha took a lead in urging his fellow administrators to remain at their posts and to work for the new government.

Meanwhile, other smaller Ottoman garrisons across Yemen did much the same, resulting in the rapid emergence of a new force structured and regularly paid along Ottoman lines, known as the 'Victorious Regular Army'. Soon, this also had its own school of military telegraphy. Most of the officers were ex-Ottoman regulars and its training methods were a strange mixture of Ottoman, German (via the old Ottoman Army) and local Arab traditions. Military commands, organisation and ranks had much the same mixture, and continued to be in Turkish until the 1930s. In some cases, they remained Turkish until the Yemen Revolution of 1962.

At the start of 1919, Yemen was the only Arab country that was independent and neither dominated nor subsidised by the British Empire. However, Imam Yahya's government would not achieve international recognition until 1926. Confident of maintaining their independence, the Yemenis nevertheless faced an entirely new military situation. In earlier years, the country's very rugged terrain and warlike traditions meant that largely tribal armies armed with little more than rifles could usually hold their own against European colonial forces. The appearance of aeroplanes over the battlefield in significant numbers would fundamentally change the military balance (see Volume Three).

As R.J. Gavin, the historian of Yemen and Aden, explained in his book *Aden Under British Rule 1839–1967*:

> Previous technical innovations in weapons production had sapped but had not completely undermined the ability of men in the Arabian Peninsula to defend themselves … The aeroplane however was a rather different proposition. It could penetrate the most inaccessible fastnesses and was especially effective in semi-desert areas where it could easily pinpoint targets. It was also expensive and difficult to purchase and required a pool of technically-trained men to maintain it which could hardly be produced by a society [such as that of Yemen] which sought to avoid contact with modern science.

Within a few weeks of the end of the First World War, the British were landing troops at Hudaydah, though for the present they did not venture further inland. Nothing much else happened until August 1919, when a British imperial emissary, Colonel H.F. Jacob, headed into the mountains from Hudaydah towards the Yemeni capital of Sana'a. Jacob was promptly imprisoned by the Quhra tribe, who feared that the British wanted to seize Imam Yahya. Jacob was soon released and the British thereupon handed over the important port of Hudaydah to Imam Yahya's rival, the Idrisid Amir of Asir. Imam Yahya had expected to retake control of Hudaydah, so in response he ordered his troops not to hand back Shu'ayb, Qutayb and Dali, which, being south of the frontier agreed between the British and Ottoman Empires before the First World War, were now theoretically within the British Aden Protectorate. Here lay the seeds of decades of further skirmishing and occasionally more serious fighting between Imam Yahya and the British Empire.

Relations between Imam Yahya and Muhammad Ibn Ali Ibn Muhammad Ibn Ahmad al-Idrisi, the Amir of Asir, had been bad for years, despite a truce back in 1911. Small and vulnerable despite its mountainous terrain, the Idrisid Amirate had signed a treaty with the British in 1915 and had, since 1917, received regular payments from them. The Idrisids now found themselves squeezed between a hostile Yemen to the south and a hostile Hashemite Hijaz to the north, both of which had ambitions to take over Asir. Thus, 1919 and the early 1920s saw frequent armed clashes between Imam Yahya and Muhammad al-Idrisi in the mountains overlooking the narrow Tihama coastal plain. Although Muhammad al-Idrisi tried to strengthen his position militarily, he had little success and so began looking towards the rising power of Ibn Sa'ud, the Sultan of Najd, who also had bad relations with Hijaz and Yemen.

Under such circumstances, one of Imam Yahya's first priorities was to strengthen his army. Consequently, the ex-Ottoman regular units were supplemented in 1919 by a new Jaysh (army) consisting of groups of levies drawn from the Sanhan, Banu Harthi and Banu Hushaish tribes around Sana'a. Each tribal contingent included a 'retainer' whose role was to report on the behaviour, good or bad, of members of his own tribe. If a member of the tribal levy in question stole anything, or left his post without permission, this retainer and tribal chief had to compensate the Imam for losses suffered as a consequence. This was a highly traditional system, but it worked well and remained in place for decades.

By the early 1920s, Imam Yahya's standing army is believed to have numbered around 60,000 men armed with Mauser rifles, and having substantial stocks of ammunition and spare guns. Though this force lacked uniforms, it was said to have many field guns and large stocks of shells. An ammunition factory had even been established at Sana'a by an unnamed Yugoslavian, German or Austrian 'businessman'.

Imam Yahya was first reported to have expressed interest in obtaining his own aeroplanes in 1922, after a flight of British aircraft from Aden bombed Yemeni troops in January of that year (see Volume Three). According to some sources, the Yemenis had even tried to repair a British aeroplane which had been forced down moderately intact, but they lacked qualified mechanics to make it airworthy or, indeed, petrol to fuel it. Whether this machine was the one brought down during clashes which followed the Great War (see Volume Two) or the damaged Henri Farman F.27 captured back on 23 January 1918 is unknown.

Nothing came of this first effort, but the following year, Imam Yahya did reach beyond the borders of Yemen, seeking assistance in the face of British pressure. He first turned to Yemen's old friend Turkey in 1923, but envoys to the new Turkish Republic's capital of Ankara returned almost empty-handed, as would a subsequent mission in 1936. On both occasions, the Turkish government had more pressing matters to attend to. Imam Yahya's rival, the Idrisid Amir Muhammad of Asir, died in 1923. The British seem to have used the death of their old ally as an excuse to abandon Asir to its fate, especially as the Idrisid Amirate now entered a period of internal division and confusion.

Before and during the First World War, Imam Yahya of Yemen had regarded Italy with great suspicion because of its support of the Idrisids, but as the latter declined, so relations between Yemen and Italy improved. Negotiations began when the Yemeni government asked if the new Fascist government in Rome would supply two aeroplanes and two flying instructors. For Mussolini, this appeared a golden opportunity to gain an advantage over his

British rivals in the Red Sea area. However, negotiations were slow and difficult, and did not bear fruit until January 1926.

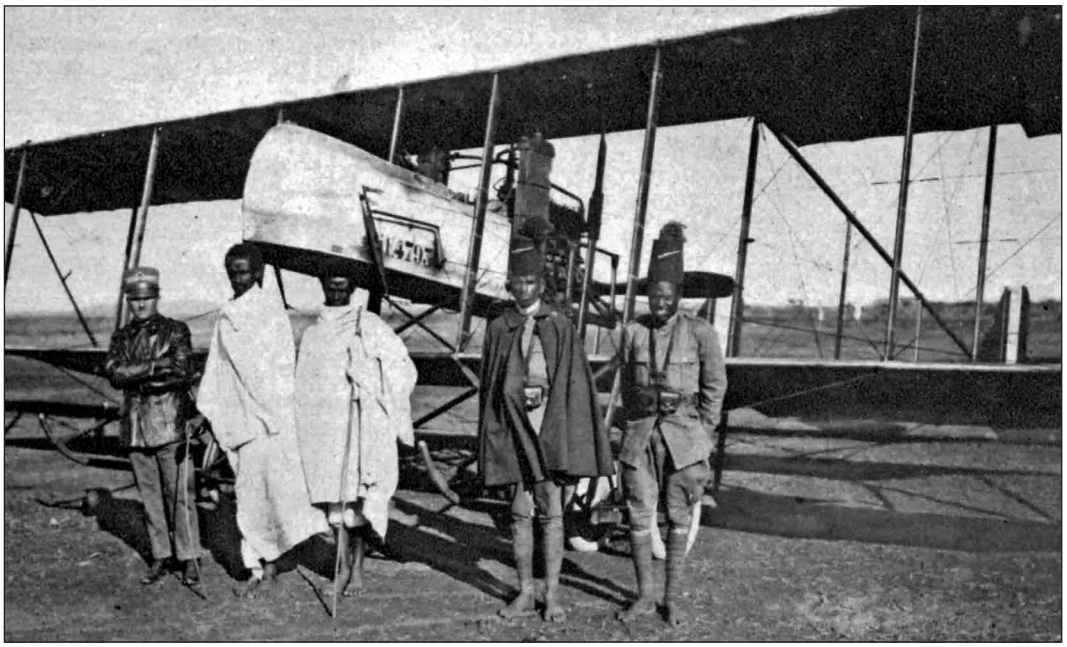
Clearly aware of what was going on, the British made another attempt to entice Imam Yahya into their camp in 1925. As part of this effort, Sir Gilbert Clayton visited Sana'a and returned impressed by Yahya's administration as well as his military organisation and preparedness. Nevertheless, there were further clashes along the border between July and October 1925, during which RAF machines based in Aden flew numerous bombing and strafing missions but also lost one aircraft. Hit in the engine by rifle fire from the ground, the pilot had to make an emergency landing and then set fire to his machine before being rescued.

The following year, 1926, would see the creation of the first Yemeni Air Force, while the Imam Yahya would proclaim himself king of what was now named the Mutawakkilite Kingdom of Yemen. His new name and title were Amir al-Mu'minin al-Mutawakkil Ala Allah Rab al-Alamin Imam Yahya Ibn al-Mansur Bi'llah Muhammad Hamid ad-Din. In English, he was sometimes called 'Imam and Commander of the Faithful, Prince of the Believers, he who relies upon God, the Lord of the Universe'. From then on, the Kingdom of Yemen gradually won international recognition, with Italy being the first to do so, and would exist until the Republican Revolution of 1962.

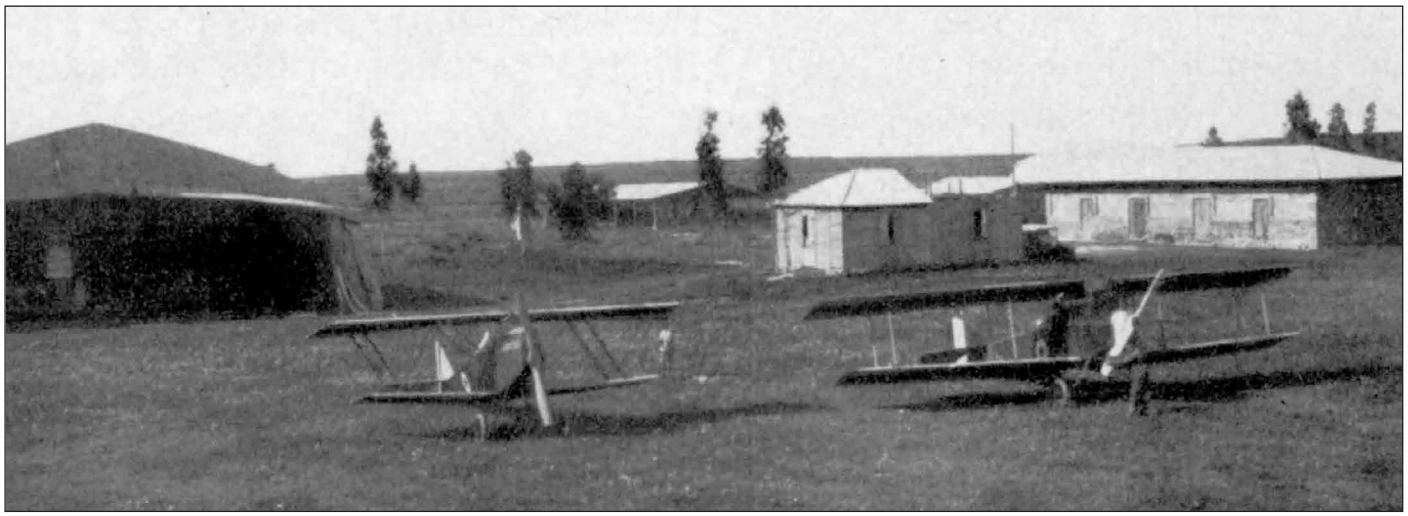
The Yemeni Army was now a quite formidable force, if archaic and largely ununiformed. It had a largely ex-Ottoman officer corps of about 300 men, and, in addition to substantial numbers of tribal levies, the regular troops formed a large palace corps. These latter were called the Special Imamate Guard; a nominally 5,000-strong unit of specially selected combatants called Ukfa who were considered totally loyal to the Imam. Then there was what the British called the 'Outback Army', numbering up to 50,000 Zaidi tribesmen – both infantry and cavalry – who served for one or two years but had to bring their own rifles and provisions on campaign.

By now the rival Idrisid Amirate of Asir was falling apart; in 1926, Hasan Ibn Ali al-Idrisi, the brother of the late Amir Muhammad Ibn Ali, signed a treaty with King Abd al-Aziz of Saudi Arabia under which what remained of Idrisi territory was placed under the protection of the new Saudi Kingdom of Hijaz. King Abd al-Aziz took control of foreign affairs but largely left internal matters to Hasan al-Idrisi. However, such subjugation did not last long, and within a short time the Idrisids refused to comply, so Abd al-Aziz sent a military force which faced little opposition. The Idrisid family fled to Yemen, and in 1934 the whole of Asir was annexed by the Saudi state.

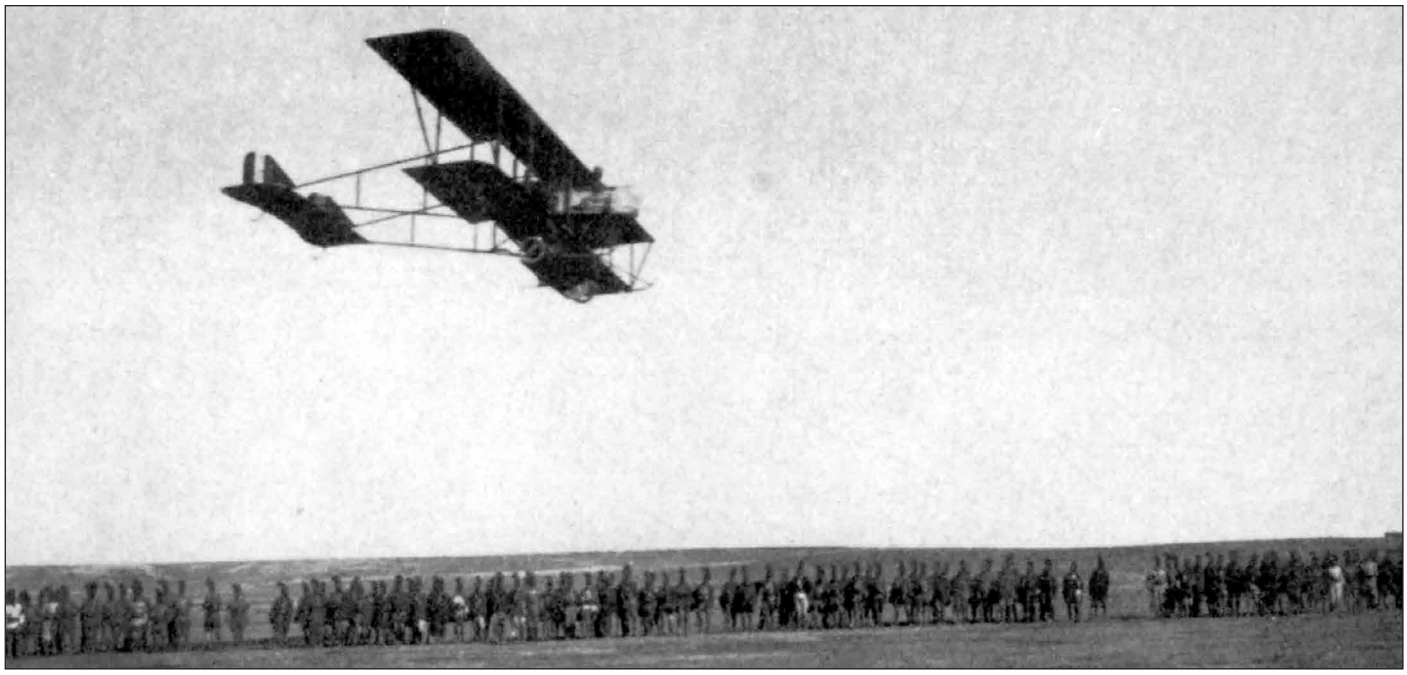
The determined hostility of the RAF to the idea of allowing 'non-white' independent states to acquire aircraft was initially focussed upon Afghanistan and Yemen, both of which were immediate and potentially hostile neighbours of important British



The Italians did not base aeroplanes in their long-established East African colony of Eritrea until 1920 and even then only old fashioned types were sent. This is one of the first, an Italian-built Farman 5B. Nevertheless, its appearance was a sign of rivalries to come, in an area where the only military aircraft had previously been British. Such a development was also watched with interest in Yemen, on the opposite side of the narrow Red Sea. (Stato Maggiore Aeronautica archive)



An Ansaldo SVA and a Pomilio PC were amongst the Italian aircraft based at the aerodrome at Sembel outside Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, early in the 1920s. A few similar types were later supplied to Yemen but not apparently from Italian stocks in Eritrea. (Stato Maggiore Aeronautica archive)



An Italian Farman flying low over the Regio Corpo Truppe Coloniali's 3rd Eritrean Battalion at Sembel in Eritrea, early in the 1920s. (Stato Maggiore Aeronautica archive)

imperial territory. Meanwhile, despite Italy's efforts to become Yemen's most important friend in the outside world, Imam Yahya of Yemen did not want to rely solely upon one external ally, especially a European 'infidel' or non-Muslim one. Links were thus also established with Iraq, which, despite being under British domination, was a fellow Arab state which wanted to forge its own alliances. This resulted in Iraq supplying substantial numbers of rifles and quantities of ammunition to Yemen in 1926. Even so, the link between Yemen and Iraq was more important morally, politically and culturally than it was in military terms.

For a really powerful ally and a source of modern military equipment, Yemen had no choice but to turn to Italy, which became the first Western European country to recognise Yemeni independence in 1926. Furthermore, the Italian government signed a treaty with Imam Yahya's government the same year. Even before these events, Tullio Pastori, an Italian businessman who had earlier negotiated the sale of aeroplanes to the Hashemite Kingdom of Hijaz (see Chapter Four), secured a contract on 6 January 1926 to supply six machines to Yemen. In March, the first three were brought ashore at Hudaydah from the cargo ship *Loredano*. The other three aeroplanes arrived in April, along with fuel and spare parts, the ship carrying them having been escorted by two Italian Navy destroyers. Unfortunately, all the aircraft were found to be old and barely serviceable, Imam Yahya complaining that they could not fly any distance before breaking down and were therefore useless.

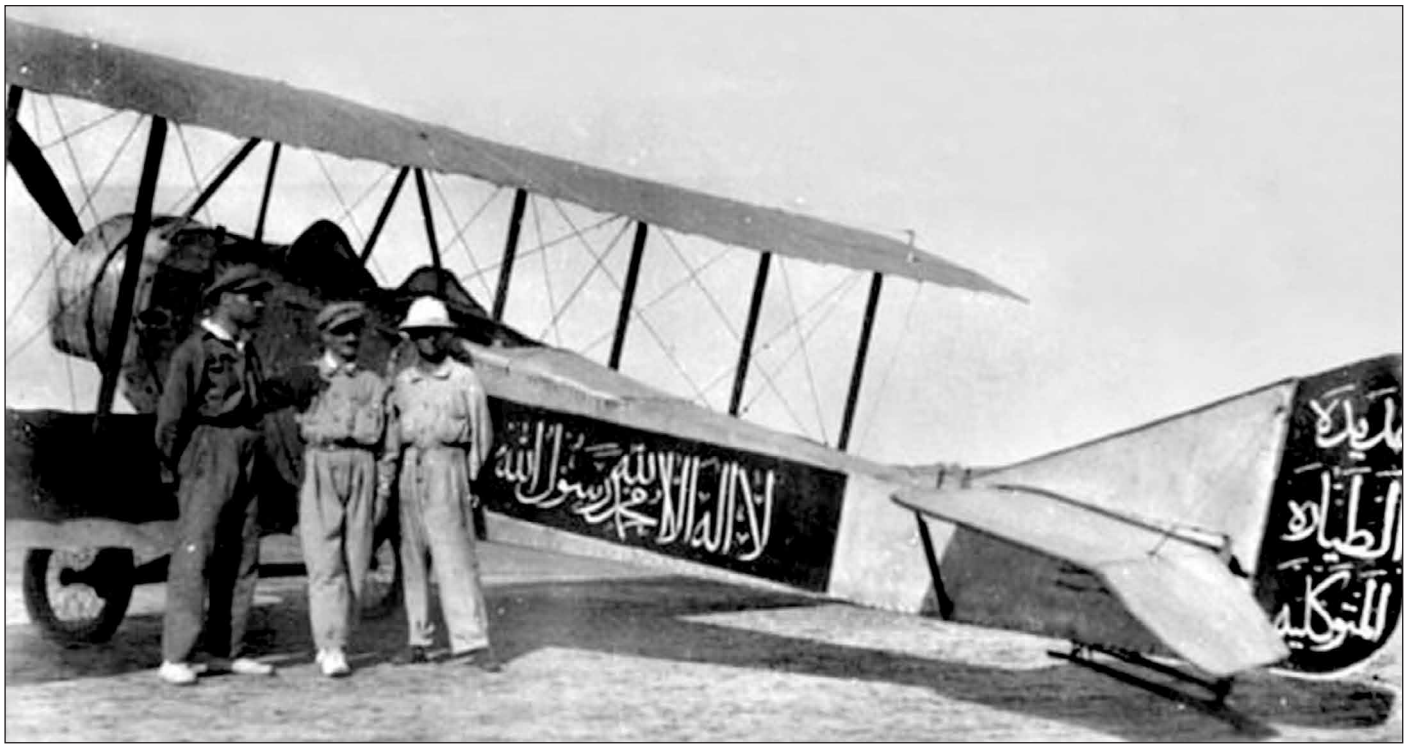
Fearing that the whole exercise might backfire, the Italian colonial Governor of Eritrea agreed in July to send better aeroplanes. One, which was reportedly a new machine, was shipped to Hudaydah in August, this time as a present from the Governor of Eritrea to Imam Yahya. The sources are unclear, but either four or six Italian airmen had arrived with the first aircraft, yet only one or two were pilots. Nevertheless, some or perhaps all of these seven machines were assembled by the Italian pilot Leonida Schiona, the same man whose assistance had earlier been sought by the Hijazi Air Force. He was accompanied by a mechanic named Accini. According to a report in the Italian journal *Il Veneto*, dated 11 November 1927, the flying school established by Schiona was outside Sana'a and already had 20 students.

Il Veneto was typical of its time in being very patronising towards the "dark children of that Kingdom" (i.e., Yemen), who supposedly took time to grasp the fact that, to start an aeroplane's engine, one had to swing its propeller. The news magazine did, however, report that Schiona made two relatively long-distance flights in Yemeni machines, one of more than 300km from Hudaydah to Dhamar and back being in an SVA.10 two-seater, and the other from Hudayhah to Sana'a being about 140km in a single-seat Hanriot HD.1.

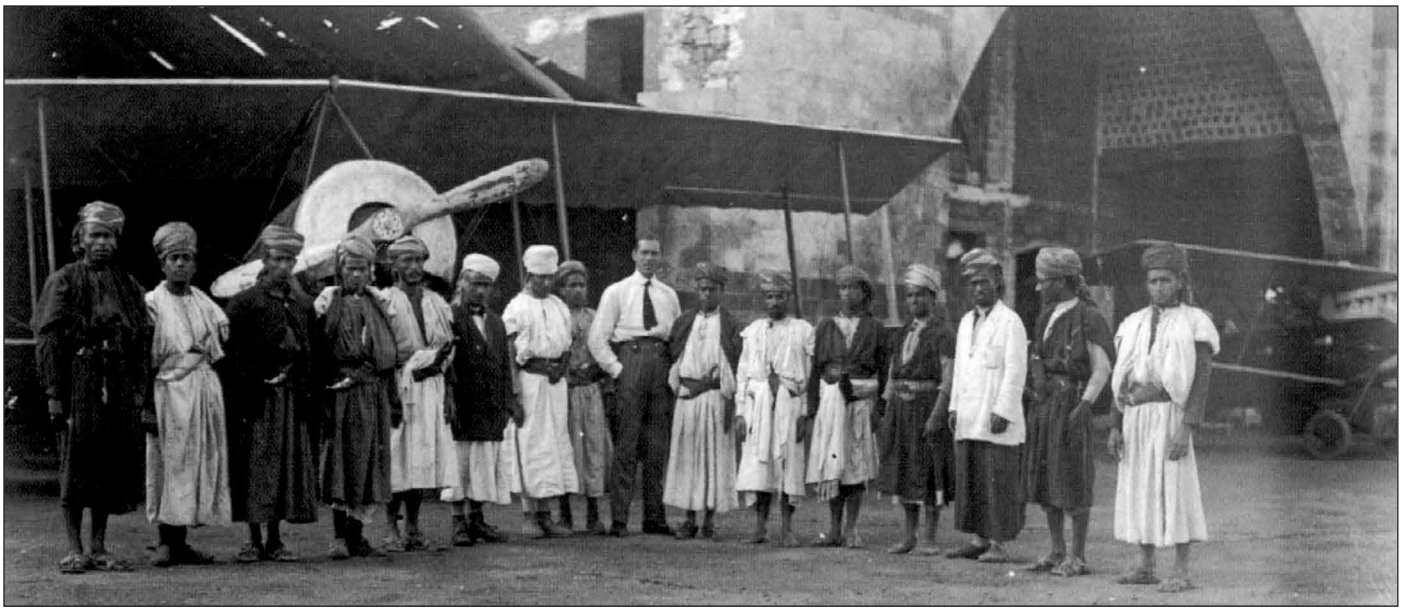
Further information about the types of machines involved remains elusive, but there was certainly also one SAML S.2, photographs of which have survived. Other evidence, especially the numbers and types of propellers provided, suggests that the actual list of machines comprised two Ansaldo SVA.10 two-seaters, one single-seat Ansaldo A.1 Balilla fighter, two SAML S.2s, one Hanriot HD.1 and one other unknown aircraft.

Despite frustrations and disappointments associated with the arrival of the first Italian aeroplanes, Imam Yahya turned to Italy for further help and a formal agreement was signed between the two countries on 2 September 1926. Eventually, the Italians would supply Yemen with a small factory to make munitions, plus a foundry to produce the Kingdom of Yemen's own coinage. Imam Yahya would even send his second son, Muhammad Ibn Yahya, on a diplomatic mission to Italy. It appears that Italy eventually supplied six tanks, 2,000 rifles and four anti-aircraft guns, plus some communications equipment; the rivalry between Britain and Italy for influence in Yemen seemed to have ended decisively in favour of the Italians.

Even less is known about the handful of young Yemenis who were trained as aircrew by Italy. All that is certain is they suffered fatalities. For example, Ahmad Isma'il Ahmad al-Kabsi was described as the first Yemeni pilot to fly over the country's capital, Sana'a. Some have also claimed him as the first Arab military pilot, but this is not correct. The other men included Muhammad Kamil and someone known only by the name Washli, both of whom were trained as engineers. There are known to



A radial engine version of the SAML S2 which Italy supplied to Yemen in 1926. The markings on the rudder are the flag of the Mutawakkili Imamate of Yemen, while those on the fuselage are the Muslim declaration of Faith – "There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Prophet of God". (Author's collection)



Leonida Schiona with one of the SAML S2 aeroplanes supplied to Yemen. He was photographed outside what appears to be the gates of the fortified city of Sana'a or perhaps of Hudayda in 1927. The Yemenis who stand on each side of him perhaps included some of Schiona's student pilots, or perhaps men he was training as aircraft mechanics. On the right is one of the Ansaldo SVA two-seaters which Yemen also purchased from Italy. (Schiona family archive)

have been two fatal crashes before the Imam Yahya called a halt to the whole programme, though the date of the first accident is unclear. What is certain is that Ahmed al-Kabsi and Washli tried to repair the damaged tail of one aeroplane, though whether this was at Hudaydah or Sana'a is again unclear. They took off for a test flight, and all seemed to go well until they came in to land. Something was clearly wrong, as al-Kabsi and Washli made several attempts before the former lost control. Both men were killed in the resulting crash.

In May 1927, Italian personnel established a small flying school in Yemen, while a group of 12 Yemeni military cadets was sent to the Breda Flying School outside Milan. Ten of them passed the medical and aptitude tests and were accepted for flying training on 7 June. Despite their almost total lack of technical knowledge, and difficulties with language, they were awarded their wings in August 1928. Meanwhile, during the autumn of 1927, another Yemeni delegation travelled to Rome. Once there, Sayf al-Islam Muhammad, Qadi Muhamad Raghib Ibn Rafiq and other senior Yemeni officials met the Italian dictator Mussolini, who agreed to provide Yemen with economic and technical assistance as well as military equipment.

Now, however, another country was entering the field: Germany, which was not as yet an ally of Italy. Germany was at the time governed by the democratic but increasingly disturbed Weimar Republic, which was replaced by the Nazi regime of Adolf Hitler in 1933. Germany had already established a number of close aviation links with Egypt, where a wealthy businessman named Hassan Anis Pasha had purchased an all-metal Junkers F.13

The only known photograph of Ahmad Isma'il Ahmad al-Kabsi, the first Yemeni pilot, appears on the Regia Aeronautica identity card issued when he was learning to fly in Italy. He was killed in a flying accident in Yemen not long after returning to the country, though the exact date is unknown. (Author's collection)

seaplane (c.n. 766) for his Arabia Trading Company. The machine was nevertheless refused entry into Egypt by the British (see Chapter Seven). In May 1927, the Junkers company offered to sell a Junkers F.13 six-seat transport and a Junkers A.35 two-seater to Yemen, again via Anis Pasha's Arabia Trading Company. This offer was promptly accepted and an order for the machines was signed in July.

On 27 July 1927, the crated aircraft, plus a spare Junkers L.5 engine, plenty of spare parts and the equipment needed for a small repair shop, were loaded aboard the ex-German, currently Belgian, cargo ship *Bovenkerk* at Rotterdam. The *Bovenkerk* dropped anchor off Hudaydah on 17 August with the crated Junkers aeroplanes, along with the German pilots, Heinrich Arntzen and Hans Täschner, plus two mechanics, Wilhelm Schmidt and Paul Schubert.

Both Junkers were, however, large machines and their crates reportedly weighed about 4,500kg each. As there were neither cranes nor modern loading quays at the Yemeni port, the aircraft and their engines had to be lifted from the ship onto smaller lighters and then brought ashore at high tide. Because there was not even a timber loading ramp, the crates were then manhandled ashore by several hundred labourers. This was nevertheless completed without serious mishap, after which both Junkers were assembled by Arntzen, Täschner, Schmidt and Schubert.

The first to be made ready was the Junkers A.35 (c.n. 1090, German registration D-1171), which went up for an air test on the morning of 20 August 1927. The Junkers F.13 (c.n. 2007, German registration D-1173) followed a few days later. They were then demonstrated in front of Imam Yahya and his children; it was reported that one of the ruler's sons was taken up for an experience of flying, though this is far from certain. The aeroplanes were then formally handed over to Yemen. Meanwhile, the German team set about building a small workshop outside Sana'a, as well as starting to train Yemeni ground crews. The Junkers company similarly offered to provide modern aircraft hangers for the otherwise exposed airfields at Hudaydah and Sana'a.

On 23 August, Arntzen made the first air mail flight across Yemen's soaring mountains from the coast to Sana'a, taking just 45 minutes instead of the normal eight days it took overland. On one occasion, shortly after sunrise, the planes are said to have flown between some of the tall, almost skyscraper-like traditional houses of Sana'a before landing close by. Most of the women of the Yemeni capital hurried onto their roofs to watch, and the Imam himself was sufficiently impressed to order that some young Yemenis must learn to fly. The Junkers aeroplanes clearly caused a sensation, resulting in a new popular song whose refrain included the words:

> In God's good morning there came to us a flyer,
> And left all the women trembling with desire.

Schmidt may not have been alone in then signing a one-year deal to fly for Yemen, though his contract appears to be the only one to survive. Dated 2 September 1927, it was signed by Schmidt and al-Mutawakkiliyah, which may have been the title of the Yemeni government rather than of a specific representative

A Junkers A. 35 which Yemen purchased in 1927, via the Arabia Trading Company owned by the Egyptian businessman Hassan Anis Pasha. It retained its German civil registration (D1171) for some time while in Yemen. Nothing is known about this machine prior to its sale to Yemen, so perhaps it came directly from the Junkers factory. (Author's collection)

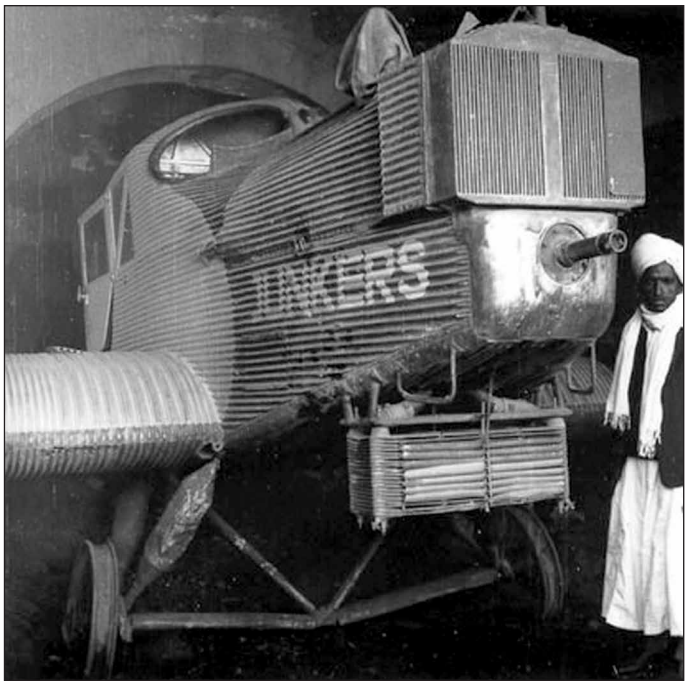
or indeed the Imam himself. Under this contract, Schmidt was expected to service the aeroplanes and train Yemeni mechanics. Furthermore, he was to convert the civilian Junkers A.35 into the armed version of the same model, the Junkers K.53, if ordered to do so. The K.53 had been developed by the Swedish branch of Junkers and differed in having a gun-mounting added to the passenger-observer's cockpit, along with two fixed machine guns ahead of the pilot's cockpit.

Just over a month later, on 3 October, disaster struck at Sana'a when Schmidt and a Yemeni student took off in the as yet unconverted A.35 on a training mission. After several steep turns at heights between 50m and 150m over the aerodrome, the Junkers stalled, fell into a spin and crashed, killing those aboard. Rumours that the ill-fated Yemeni student was one of Imam Yahya's sons proved to be false; the unfortunate student was a sergeant in the Yemeni military headquarters. In some sources he was called al-Saraji ('the saddler'), though whether this was his name, his rank or his function remains unknown. However, the possibility that the machine had been sabotaged by a British agent persisted. Supposedly, one of the pilots waved a cloth when he realised that the plane was in trouble, though this seems unlikely.

Almost certainly correct, however, is the story that after the Junkers crashed, several people hurried to the scene, one of the Yemeni onlookers saying: "That is al-Saraji's blood, and that is the Christian's blood. It has not mixed with al-Saraji's." European 'infidels' remained suspect and indeed despised in Yemen's closed and highly traditional society at this time. On 12 October, the Yemeni government paid for both of the Junkers, and next day the surviving German personnel headed home via British-ruled Aden. They then travelled to Cairo in company with Anis Pasha. According to Heinrich Arntzen's report, there were some 10–15 Italians still working in Yemen when he left, though he described their aeroplanes as "worthless".

During 1927, King Abd al-Aziz of Saudi Arabia had wanted to discuss the frontier problem with Yemen, but the Imam of Yemen insisted on claiming all of Asir, so nothing came of this approach. For its part, Yemen found it almost impossible to train suitable aviation mechanics because so few people in the country had any modern technical knowledge. As a result, Imam Yahya's continuing attempts to purchase aircraft failed to produce even a small air force.

In January 1928, another German pilot named Martin Hänichen arrived at Hudaydah, having been contracted to train Yemeni technicians. He was even more dismissive of the Italians than his predecessor, maintaining that Italy had tricked Yemen into purchasing ancient and almost worthless materiel. He also claimed that the Italian pilots had only flown twice since they arrived in Yemen, which was certainly untrue. Hänichen's attempts to train Yemeni students also proved frustrating and difficult, not least because of the lack of a mutually intelligible language or an interpreter.



The six-seater, all-metal Junkers F. 13 transport which the Imam of Yemen also purchased from Germany via Hassan Anis Pasha's Arabia Trading Company. It probably no longer flew after 1927 though it remained in a hanger outside Sana'a where it was photographed in April 1955. Thereafter it is said to have been used as a source of scrap aluminium by local metalworkers. (Author's collection)

There was trouble on the border between Yemen and the British Aden Protectorate when, in February 1928, the Imam's forces again seized Dali on the British side of the frontier. In response, the RAF's No. 8 Squadron, based outside Aden, bombed Yemeni troops during February and March, forcing them back into the Imam's territory. Further fighting erupted in June and August, one RAF pilot being shot down and killed. According to Hänichen,

After his adventurers in the Hijaz and Yemen, Leonida Schiona returned to Italy. In 1933 the now balding pioneer pilot was chosen to fly a Savoia-Marchetti S.71 of the Societa Aerea Mediterranea, supported by the Italian Air Force, from Rome to Ramla in Palestine. Schiona was carrying a message from Pope Pius XI to the newly reinstalled Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem. He appears here next to the Savoia-Marchetti and in front of a banner of the Cavalieri del Santo Sepolcro. (Schiona family archive)

the Yemenis claimed to have brought down no fewer than seven British machines. British aeroplanes also attacked targets on the Yemeni coast, and when they started to approach Sana'a and Hudaydah, all flying by Yemeni aircraft ceased. The surviving Junkers F.13 was disassembled and placed into store. Imam Yahya now seems to have agreed with Hänichen that the archaic Italian aircraft were of no use and is said to have abandoned his attempt to create a Yemeni Air Force.

Nevertheless, there were reports in the Egyptian press in 1928 that a Yemeni aeroplane had flown over Aden, and that the British governor of the town had sent a delegation to Sana'a to beg Imam Yahya to stop such flights. These claims were almost certainly untrue, but the vehemence of British denials demonstrated the sensitivity of the subject. What the 10 newly qualified Yemeni pilots thought of the situation when they returned from Italy in August 1928 is unknown. Martin Hänichen left Yemen for Cairo in February 1929, reporting that there were currently six Italian-trained Yemeni pilots flying and that the stored Junkers F.13 was still in good condition.

The last available report on this, the first Yemeni Air Force, dates from October 1930. It stated that there were still five Italian aeroplanes in the country, but that all were unserviceable. The F.13 was still in store, where it would remain until the 1960s. After a military coup overthrew the last Mutawakkilite Imam, the Imam Yahya's grandson, Muhammad al-Badr, in 1962, this machine was apparently used as a source of scrap aluminium for a nearby factory.

The Kingdom of Yemen therefore had no aircraft with which to support its ground troops in the fighting which flared between Yemen and Saudi Arabia in the 1930s. The Saudis retook earlier Yemeni gains in the Asir area and even won control of the port of Hudaydah, though this would later be handed back. Imam Yahya, meanwhile, faced increasing demands for autonomy from various tribes within Yemen. Nevertheless, even without air cover, the Imam's forces gradually spread his authority across the whole country during the 1930s.

Tension with the British remained and being unable to face war on two fronts and still with restless tribes within his own territory, Imam Yahya came to terms with his neighbours. Turning his attention to the southern threat, he signed the Treaty of Sana'a with the British authorities in Aden in February 1934. This recognised a mutually agreed frontier which more or less followed the same line that had been agreed between the British and the Ottoman Empire before the First World War. Having been defeated by Saudi forces, which took permanent control of the historic frontier town of Najran, Imam Yahya had little choice but to accept Saudi terms and thus signed the Treaty of Taif on 20 May 1934.

Such humiliations could have undermined Imam Yahya's authority within Yemen, but instead the Yemeni ruler spent the following 14 years until his assassination in 1948 consolidating his government's power and creating a centralised administration answerable directly to himself. This involved greatly strengthening his army. He also appointed some of his sons as governors of key provinces, while others were placed in charge of various old and newly created political institutions. There was even an attempt to guide and develop the nation's economy. Nevertheless, Yemen remained an archaic and authoritarian state, where even the most basic measures required the Imam's personal approval.

During the 1930s, as had been the case earlier, the regular formations of the Yemeni Army were largely trained by foreign experts, though these were usually now fellow Arabs from Syria and Iraq. Yemen signed a treaty of friendship and cooperation with Iraq, after which many officer cadets and civilian specialists were sent to Baghdad for more advanced training. The first group went in 1934, but so many returned with revolutionary Arab Nationalist and even occasionally democratic or socialist ideas that Imam Yahya stopped sending any more. Thereafter, military cadets were either trained locally or were sent to less 'revolutionary' Muslim countries, mostly commonly to Egypt. Even this was eventually replaced by inviting Arab training missions to do their work inside Yemen, which would also backfire in 1962.

6
THE CREATION OF THE ROYAL IRAQI AIR FORCE

By the 1930s, military aviation had already played a very important role in the volatile affairs of Mesopotamia, the 'Land Between the Rivers', but it had been British and Ottoman aviation, not Iraqi. Iraq, as this region became known shortly after the First World War, was one of those parts of the world where the importance of air power had not only been demonstrated during the Great War but, in a very different way, continued to be in the troubled decades which followed (see Volume Three). Though the British RFC, RNAS (Royal Naval Air Service) and then RAF had helped to liberate this part of the Arab world from Ottoman domination, the RAF played an even more prominent role in subduing the country and ensuring that its peoples accepted, with greater or lesser willingness, the establishment of a Hashemite Kingdom of Iraq under British domination.

Iraq was basically formed from three Ottoman wilayats, or provinces. These were centred upon Baghdad, which, though mixed, had a Sunni Muslim Arab majority; the Basra area, where Shi'a Muslim Arabs formed a clear majority; and largely Arab Mosul, around which Kurds predominated though there was also a significant if fragmented Christian community. Thereafter, RAF squadrons, operating from the major British air bases at Shaibah, Hinaidi (subsequently called Mu'askar al-Rashid) and Dhibban (Habbaniya), continued to help consolidate the new Iraqi state.

In August 1921, Britain – which ruled Mesopotamia/Iraq under a League of Nations mandate – set up the Amir Faisal Ibn Husayn, lately and briefly the King of Syria, as King of Iraq. His regime was Arab and Sunni Muslim in character, though Sunni Arabs were a minority within the country. Not surprisingly, there was significant and often violent hostility to this new regime. Indeed, the Hashemite Kingdom of Iraq would almost certainly not have survived without British military support, not least from the RAF. The main opposition came from the largely Sunni Muslim Kurds in the north and the Shi'a Arabs in the south. In neither case was their opposition to what came to be regarded as the 'Baghdad government' entirely reconciled – though it might occasionally be crushed.

Iraq is often credited with creating the first air force in the Arab world, but this is not correct (see Chapters Four and Five). Nevertheless, the race between Iraq and Egypt to establish their own flying corps was a significant aspect of deep-rooted political and cultural competition between these two Arab lands. In both, there were people inside and outside the ruling elites who were keen to encourage 'air mindedness' amongst the educated sections of their respective populations. These aspirations were well

known to the British government, which, though not keen on the establishment of what were termed 'native air forces' within the British sphere of influence and Empire, tended to assume that they were more or less inevitable.

Confidential correspondence on this topic between Air Vice-Marshal J.F.A. Higgins of the British Air Ministry and Sir Hugh Trenchard, the Chief of the Air Staff, was particularly intense during the last days of July 1926. It focussed primarily on the case of Iraq and provides a fascinating insight into the political stresses and cultural attitudes of the time. While Sir Henry Conway Dobbs, the British High Commissioner and C-in-C Iraq from 1923-29, was keen on the creation of an Iraqi Air Force, there was still a general assumption that most 'Eastern people' could not become good pilots or mechanics. An exception was, however, already made where Japan was concerned.

As the Air Ministry made clear, "We are by the schedule to the Military Agreement committed in theory to assist the Iraqis to form Iraqi air units in 1925/26. Obviously, however, the Iraqi finances will not stand the creation of air units at the present time and we have been able to postpone the issue." The plain-speaking 'Boom' Trenchard, as he was affectionately known to his men, replied to Air Vice-Marshal. Higgins on 28 July 1926, stating;

> You say that if we do not assist Iraq to form a native air force of their own, she will get another nation to do it. This is not correct, for such a step would definitely not be allowed. The great thing we want to avoid is having to say to the Iraqis that they are not going to have an air force, and we do not say this. We only say that until they get their ground forces securely established on a sound basis, it is too early to think about raising an air force.
>
> I feel certain that you will appreciate the fact that the reaction of providing Iraq with an air force of her own would be felt in India and in Egypt and would have far-reaching effects in these countries.

Trenchard went on to admit that such air forces would probably become inevitable at some time but concluded by insisting that his opinions of this matter were shared by almost everyone in the higher ranks of the RAF. What both sides of the argument agreed, however, was that a powerful British aerial presence should be maintained in Iraq, which in practice meant three or four RAF squadrons.

Apart from Sir Henry Dobbs, the only other influential people in the United Kingdom to actively favour this idea seem to have been found in British aeroplane manufacturing companies. They, of course, hoped to sell more machines and, in so doing, to help their industry survive the difficult years which followed the First World War. Another Air Ministry memo, dated 29 July 1926, concluded this particular correspondence by summing up the situation:

> The reactions, in India and Egypt, of providing Iraq with an air force of her own, must always be kept in mind, and although we realise quite well that some day we may be forced to have native air forces in countries under British influence, we want to put off that day as long as possible and until such a contingency is absolutely unavoidable.

Eventually, Trenchard's opposition to non-European aircrew was pushed aside, though he and many others in the RAF never really changed their views on the matter. In 1927, negotiations between the British and Iraqi governments resulted in an Anglo-Iraqi treaty and the recognition of Iraq as a quasi-independent country. This treaty was intended to last for 25 years and was, of course, very favourable to the interests of Britain and the British Empire. It not only guaranteed Iraqi assistance to Britain in time of war but allowed the passage of British and Imperial troops through the country at all times. Furthermore, a British Military Mission remained attached to the Iraqi Army and two of the existing British air bases remained under RAF control. The latter would be greatly expanded and developed during the following decades. Of these, Shaibah was near Basra in the deep south of Iraq, while the other was at Dhibban (Habbaniya) in the centre of the country, west of Baghdad. From the British point of view, they formed vital links in a chain of imperial communications to and from India, whereas they remained an insurance policy for the new Iraqi ruling family, guaranteeing the survival of the Hashemite regime for many years.

The system thus created clearly gave the British a privileged position in the development of the Iraqi oil industry, and of Iraq in general, while ensuring continued British economic, political and military aid in return for an acceptance of the status quo. Meanwhile, in the eyes of a steadily increasing number of Iraqis – civil, military and from all of the country's religious and linguistic communities – Habbaniyah and Shaibah looked like bastions of British imperial domination.

Nevertheless, the British were not alone in taking an interest in Iraqi affairs, even in the aeronautical field. For example, the German Junkers company soon enjoyed a notable success across the frontier in Persia (Iran), where it established a postal air service in the 1920s, though in collaboration with the British. In contrast, the British authorities were far from enthusiastic about Junkers gaining entry into other markets in the Middle East, especially within countries dominated by Britain. It must be pointed out, however, that apart from Aden, these British-dominated Arab countries did not technically form part of the British Empire.

Meanwhile, the Hashemite King Faisal flew from Iraq to Egypt in an aeroplane of No. 70 Squadron, RAF, arriving at the RAF depot and aerodrome at Abu Qir on 24 June 1930. That same day, he was driven to Alexandria to complete his journey to Europe by sea. No. 70 Squadron was a heavy transport unit based at Heliopolis outside Cairo, using Vickers 56 Victorias, which were an early version of the better known Vickers 264 Valentia (many Victorias would actually be converted into Valentias). Just over three months later, on 30 September, the Iraqi monarch was back at Abu Qir, taking off for home in another Victoria of No. 70 Squadron. In November 1930, King Faisal again passed through Abu Qir, this time in company with his brother, the Amir Abdullah of Transjordan.

The Iraqi and British governments had different motives for wanting – or being willing to allow – the creation on an Iraqi Air Force. For the Iraqis, possession of almost any sort of air arm would increase the central government's ability to deal with threats to its authority by insurgent or dissident groups. Of these, the most immediately threatening were Kurdish tribes, usually led or encouraged by Shaikh Mahmud Barzanji (Barzani). Indeed, some Kurds had again risen in revolt following the signature of a second Anglo-Iraqi Treaty in June 1930, at a time when it appeared that the British were handing over authority to the Baghdad government. In reality, Britain's League of Nations mandate over Iraq did not end until the country became fully independent – though still under considerable British 'influence' – in 1932. This

particular Kurdish rebellion took Iraqi and British forces eight months to subdue, and its embers were still being stamped out when the Iraqi Air Force formally came into existence.

Officially, the story of the Royal Iraqi Air Force, or RIrAF, could be said to have begun in March 1921, at a conference in the Semiramis Hotel in Cairo. This was attended by senior members of the British mandatory authorities in Palestine and Mesopotamia (as Iraq was still known at the time). They included two Iraqis, who were the only Arabs present in an official capacity. The conference's primary task was to find a solution to recent unrest in Mesopotamia, and to satisfy the Hashemite family whose troops and tribal followers had fought as Britain's allies during the First World War. Winston Churchill was also there as Britain's new Colonial Secretary, along with his special advisor T.E. Lawrence 'of Arabia'. Unfortunately, Churchill seems to have dismissed the two-week conference as a gathering of the 'Forty Thieves' of *Arabian Nights* fables fame, and to have spent much of his time either painting pictures or working on his self-justifying history of the First World War (*The World Crisis*, in six volumes, published in London between 1923 and 1931).

Funding for Iraq's small armed forces, including the police, was actually reduced in June 1922. On the other hand, a committee was formed only a few months later in January 1923, under the chairmanship of Air Vice-Marshal John Salmond, Air Officer Commanding (RAF) Iraq Command since October 1922. Its job was, amongst other things, to look at the question of Iraqi aviation. For some of the British, this seemed to offer an opportunity to share the defence burden in Iraq and thus reduce the number of RAF squadrons in the country.

What is clear is that memories of this Cairo Conference and the aviation committee were still in the minds of the Iraqi government when, early in 1925, it decided to strengthen the Iraqi Army and improve its training with British help. According to the records of the Iraqi Prime Minister's Office, the decision to provide necessary funds was made on 14 April 1925. Furthermore, the newly created Royal Iraqi Army was to include the rudiments of an air force, though this remained an ambition rather than a reality for several years. In its first form in 1931, the new flying corps was supposed to consist of two squadrons, each of three flights of six aircraft, with 36 pilots. At first it was expected that the first four (later five) Iraqi officer pilots would be trained in England, as was also planned for an anticipated Egyptian air force, while 20 ground crew and technicians would be trained in Iraq.

Meanwhile, King Faisal of Iraq, having relied on No. 70 Squadron RAF to provide him with air transport the previous year, now made use of an Imperial Airways de Havilland 66 Hercules named 'City of Baghdad' (G-EBMY). This was a three-engined aeroplane which Imperial Airways used on many of its Middle Eastern routes. Imperial Airways was proud to be carrying Iraqi royalty, announcing that it recently had:

> the distinction of carrying on the Cairo–Basra service HM King Faisal and the Emir Ghazi [Faisal's son and heir] of Iraq. Earlier in the month, the heir to the throne of Iraq, who was returning from Harrow [an elite school in England] accompanied by his tutor, travelled in the 'City of Baghdad' between Cairo and the Iraqi capital. HM King Feisal, attended by Tashine Bey Khadri and other members of his suite, later flew from Baghdad to Gaza [in Palestine]. During the flight the King sent out by wireless a message of brotherly greeting for the Emir Abdulla of Transjordania [subsequently King Abdullah of Jordan].

King Faisal was clearly keen on aviation for his country, and on flying as a means of travel. Although there is no evidence that he had gone up in any of the RFC aeroplanes which flew in support of the Arab Revolt during the First World War (see Volume Two), Faisal would certainly have recognised the potential of air power during that campaign. Such an understanding of military aviation would have been strengthened when the French used aeroplanes

The first Iraqi pilots after undergoing training in England. The photograph is said to have been taken as early as 1931, but the large number 4 on the front fuselage of the closest DH.60 Moth suggests that it was probably taken while these men were preparing for their long delivery flight back to Iraq. (Iraqi Air Force archive)

against him in Syria in 1920. The Iraqi king was therefore one of the prime movers in the creation of the Iraqi Air Force.

The establishment of a new air force involved more than just the purchase of aeroplanes and the training of air and ground crews. It required an administrative framework, which had to fit into the existing Iraqi Army and government structures. For example, an inordinate number of meetings and discussions were needed before just one room in the Iraqi Ministry of Defence was assigned as an office for what appears to have been an Egyptian administrative advisor. Meanwhile, another office or building would be allocated to *Mulazim Awal Tayyar* (First Lieutenant Pilot) Natiq Muhammad Khalil al-Tay at RAF Hinaidi aerodrome, to serve as a preliminary headquarters.

When it came to national markings for their new air force, the Iraqis decided to do something original. The wings and fuselages of Iraqi military aircraft would bear triangular markings, supposedly a very stylised representation of Mesopotamia itself, consisting of a green field outlined in black, with the Euphrates and Tigris rivers represented by a stylised Arabic letter Jim (also standing for Jaysh or 'Army' in Arabic) in red, plus a small white diamond. The rudder markings were also unusual, consisting of four rather than the usual three vertical stripes: green, white, red and black. These markings would, however, undergo many changes, and reversals to earlier forms, during the turbulent history of the Iraqi Air Force.

After intense competition, six *Mulazim* (lieutenant) junior officers were selected to be sent to England for training as military pilots at the elite Royal Air Force College at Cranwell in Lincolnshire in 1928 and 1929. One of the British cadets who trained alongside them was Alfred Earle, who remembered the first Iraqi cadets as capable and pleasant men, though he deplored their subsequent involvement in Iraq's bloody politics. Five of them eventually graduated with honours: Natiq Muhammad Khalil al-Tay, Muhammad Ali Jawad, Hafzi Aziz, Musa Ali and Akram Talib Mushtaq. They were next attached to various RAF Army Cooperation squadrons. These or perhaps other Iraqi cadets were also trained alongside RAF and Turkish Air Force cadets at RAF Spitalgate, near Grantham in Lincolnshire.

RAF units in Iraq would subsequently offer further training in what would be the Iraqi pilots' primary duties. Here, the British lower ranks resented having to obey those they termed 'black officers'. One such was Spencer Viles, an air-gunner, who stated that some of the Iraqi officers attached to the RAF for training were good pilots, but he would only fly with them if given a direct order to do so by his British superiors. It was also widely claimed by British aircrew that Iraqi airmen were cowards who would bale out at the first sign of trouble, though there is absolutely no evidence that this was true.

Some of the first Iraqi pilots subsequently rose to command the Iraqi Air Force. Akram Mushtaq had not initially been selected for the first group to be sent to England and was slightly younger than the other members. Born in Baghdad in 1903, Mushtaq entered the Iraqi Military College in 1924 and was commissioned as a Muzalim Thani (second lieutenant) on 1 July 1927, the same year as his colleague Muhammad Ali Jawad, after which Mushtaq commanded an infantry platoon in the Iraqi Army's 5th Division. Akram Mushtaq was then sent to the RAF College in Britain on 1 February 1929. There, his progress as a trainee pilot was so encouraging that he was selected to join the first four qualified men of the newly formed Iraqi First Flight, thus bringing the number of trained Iraqi pilots up to the number required to fly their country's new aeroplanes back to Iraq.

Another early Iraqi Air Force officer was Sami Abd al-Fattah. He was younger than Mushtaq, having been born in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul in 1905, and entered the Military College on 1 September 1925 (the Iraqi Army's officer training system accepted two courses per year). Sami al-Fattah was sent to Britain in May 1930 and graduated from Cranwell as a pilot in May the following year. Though he was not among the Iraqi pilots who flew their country's first aeroplanes back to Iraq, he was soon sent to the Staff College, where he achieved a bachelor's degree.

Other Iraqis were also now being trained as pilots by the RAF in Britain, including Husain Janabi. He studied at Cranwell alongside Alfred Earle, both of them then being sent to Iraq to further refine their skills. Janabi went to what would become the RIrAF and Earle to No. 55 Squadron RAF. Another recent member of No. 55 Squadron at that time was Spencer Viles, now an NCO air-gunner and bomb-aimer on Westland Wapitis. Both Earle and Viles witnessed the tragic accident which resulted in the death of Husain Janabi's gunner, though their interpretations of its cause – and the responsibility for it – varied considerably.

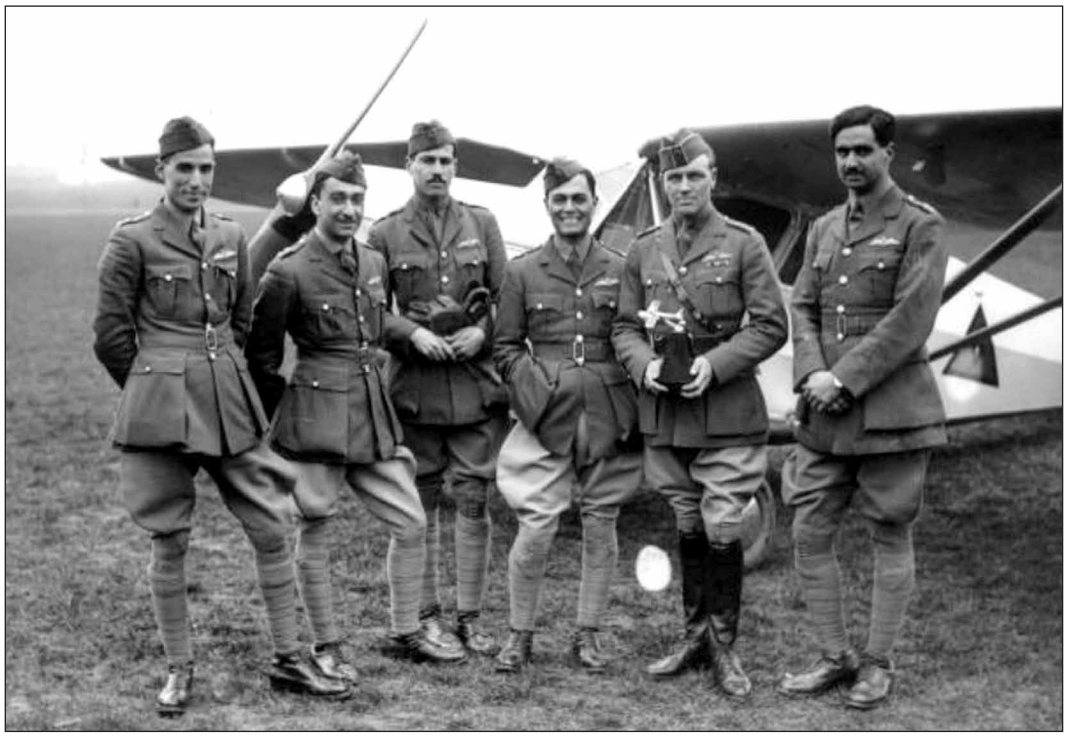
As a pilot who also flew Wapitis, Earle was probably best able to judge. In a remarkable interview which the then Air Chief Marshal Sir Alfred Earle gave later in life, a transcript of which is preserved in the Imperial War Museum library, he described some of the difficulties posed by the aerodrome at Hinaidi, near Baghdad. The Iraqi climate normally made flying much easier than it was in Great Britain, despite the frequent dust storms, and Earle said:

> The other climatic hazard was that when it did rain, the airfields tended to turn into rather marshes, mud heaps, and were unserviceable for up to three or four days after a very heavy rain. And we had one unfortunate crash I remember. We had a so-called all-weather strip at Hinaidi, which was a slightly raised strip with two very shallow gutters at either side. We had an Iraqi pilot [*Mulazim Thani*/Second Lieutenant Husain Janabi] who was attached to the squadron, flew, oh, I suppose, a week after we'd had rain, landed across this strip – across the gutters – and sank into one gutter. The aircraft went up on its nose and unfortunately his gunner wasn't strapped in and was shot out and killed. That's the only time I remember a bad crash owing to the bad airfields. But it was fairly tricky taking off – or landing – within a couple of days of the rain. You had to stick on the all-weather strip or there was always a danger of getting bogged and going up on your nose.

It did not, of course, take much to tip a Wapiti onto its nose. In his transcribed interview, air-gunner Viles was far harsher in his judgement:

> He [Husain Janabi] was flying with one of our gunners on New Year's Eve 1931 [actually 31 January 1930] and he landed on the airfield after we'd had quite some rain on it, and almost stopped, and [the Westland Wapiti] tipped over on his nose. And his gunner, Chamberlain [actually Leading Aicraftman (LAC) Alexander Donaldson Chambers], had undone his donkey … we used to have what was called a donkey chain, it was a cable which was attached to your parachute harness here to the floor, [and] had a quick snap release to it. And he'd undone that thinking 'Oh well we're down now' and the thing tipped over, throwing him out and he landed on his head and broke his neck.

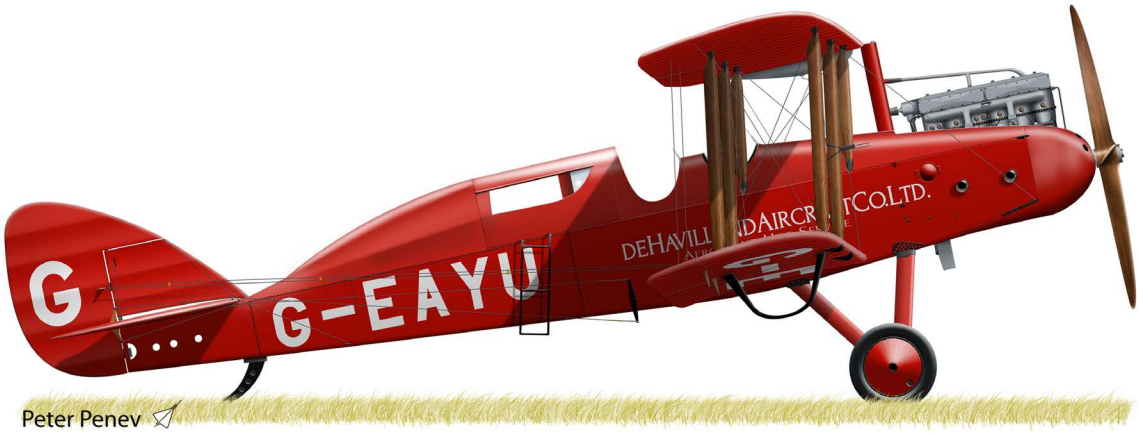
The first delivery of de Havilland DH.60M Moths for the Royal Iraqi Air Force lined up on Hatfield aerodrome before being delivered. These early Iraqi aircraft had serial numbers written in European rather than true Arabic numerals, written on their fuselages ahead of the wings, nos. 1, 2 and 3 being visible in this photograph. (de Havilland archive)



Iraq's first military pilots during their training in England in front of one of the Royal Iraqi Air Force's (RIrAF) first de Havilland DH.80 Puss Moths. From left to right the men are Mulazim Tayar Akram Talib Mushtaq, Mulazim Tayar Musa Ali, Mulazim Tayar Hafzi Aziz, Mulazim Tayar Natiq Muhammad Khalil al-Tay, Major Carter the British officer in charge of the flight, and Mulazim Tayar Muhammad Ali Jawad. The picture is said to have been taken on 8 April 1931. (Albert Grandolini collection)

RAF records show that LAC Chambers died on 1 January 1931 in RAF Hinaidi hospital, aged 26, and that *Mulazim Thani* Husain Janabi of the RIrAF was unhurt. The aeroplane involved was a Westland Wapiti Mk IIA, serial number J9635, of No. 55 Squadron. This accident clearly shocked Viles, who thereafter tried to avoid flying with an Iraqi for the rest of his career and blamed Husain Janabi "because he should never have killed Chamberlain [Chambers] – he saw this pool of water a mile away and went straight to it, he didn't have to, he could have glided round, he could have turned the aircraft slightly to go passed it. He went straight at it and up she went." The unfortunate air-gunner's serious error in undoing his own safety strap was only mentioned once. For his part, Husain Janabi went on to have a successful career in the RIrAF, becoming the CO of No. 1 Squadron in 1938-39 and apparently Commander of the Northern Air Command based at Mosul in 1939.

Meanwhile, the first 32 aircraft mechanics of a required 50 men were trained by RAF personnel outside Baghdad. According to Iraqi government records dated 11 June 1930, the Iraqi Minister of Defence had not only submitted a request to the Council of Ministers for the recruitment of skilled craftsmen, but also for a solution to be found to the language problem. British RAF technicians were not, of course, expected to teach their courses in Arabic. All the Iraqi student technicians were volunteers, mostly drawn from what were described as automobile workshops in Baghad. They trained on six British aeroplanes in a hanger in the southern corner of Hinaidi aerodrome. Nevertheless, it appears that they were not initially expected to complete their training until 1932. Meanwhile, the costs, including salaries for

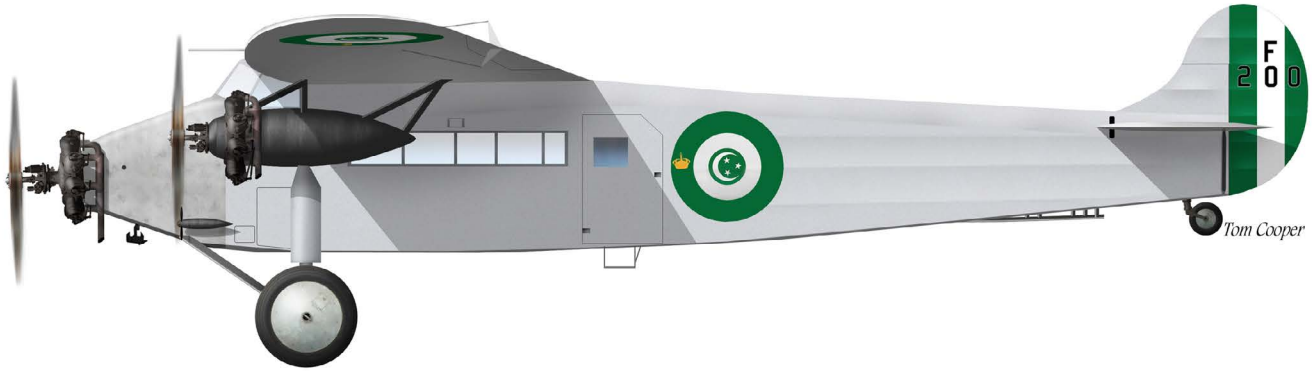


This DH.9C (c.n. DH9C/15) had been registered as G-EAYU on 12 October 1921 when belonged to the de Havilland Aircraft Co Ltd. After being used by the DH Aeroplane Hire Service, it was sold to the Hashemite government of the Hijaz in western Arabia on 3 November 1924. Apparently, the Hijazi authorities purchased two of this type, probably via the Schumacher and Lavison Company based in Cairo, along with several war surplus DH.9 bombers. However, the only DH.9C known to have been used by the Hijazi Air Force was destroyed by the premature explosion on an improvised bomb while in flight on 18 January 1925. This machine is said to have been an overall red colour, with markings in large white letters, but while the British civilian registration seems to have remained unchanged, other writing on the fuselage was probably removed before it was sold to the Hijaz government for military purposes. There were several different versions of cabin layout in the DH.9C, though the machine in question had the same open pilot's cockpit between the wings as seen on the original military DH.9s. Behind was an open passenger cockpit and then an enclosed passenger cabin with two open and unglazed windows each side. (Artwork by Peter Penev)

After finally surrendering to the army of the Hashemite Arab Revolt on 9 January 1919 and then leaving the Arabian Peninsula, the Ottoman garrison in Madina (Medina) left behind at least one intact but no longer airworthy aeroplane. This was a German-built Albatros C-III (Ottoman serial number number AK 30; ex-German number 2285/16; c.n. 599) which had previously been used by the Ottoman 3rd Bölük (Squadron). It had been licence-built by the Hansa-Brandenburg (Hansa) Company and had the curved upwards sweep of the main exhaust pipe which was distinctive to Hansa-built machines, the engine being a 160 hp Mercedez D III. By the time of the Ottoman surrender the Albatros was an old machine, having been delivered to the Ottoman Empire in October 1916, and would have been virtually worn out by the end of the First World War. In fact, there is no evidence that the machine flew for the Kingdom of Hijaz, although some sources suggest that the victorious Arabs had hoped to make use of it. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)

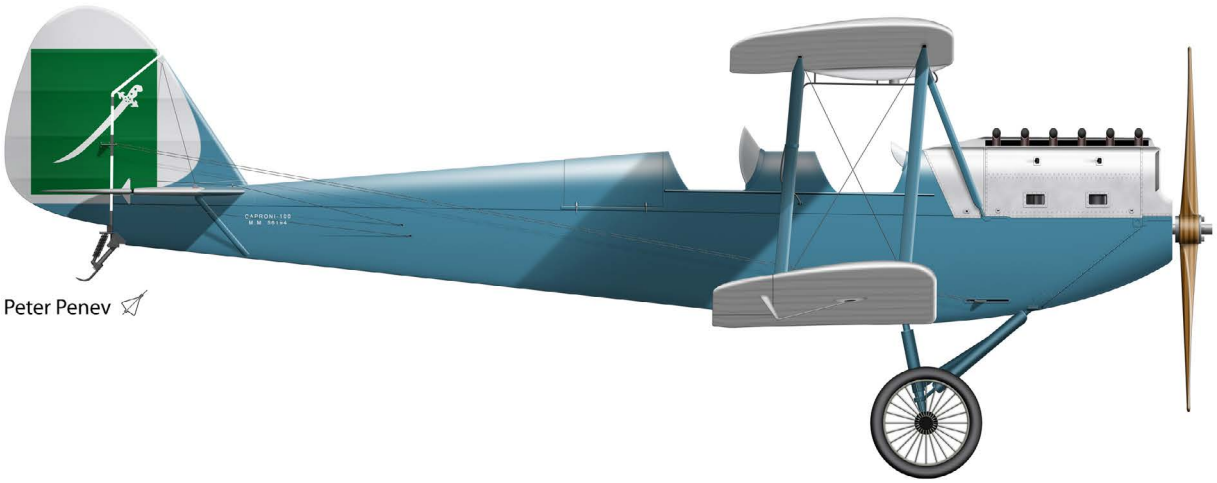
In 1926 Italy supplied two Ansaldo SVA 10 two-seaters to Yemen. These were unarmed versions of the type, which made them virtually identical to the earlier Ansaldo SVA 9. Only one partial photograph of a Yemeni Ansaldo SVA 10 two-seater is known and this does not show the rear fuselage or tail. So, the presence or otherwise of Yemeni markings is unknown. However, in this reconstruction it has been assumed that the inscription which was applied to the tail of at least one of the Yemeni SAMLs was also present on other aeroplanes sold to Yemen by the Italian government at the same time. It can be translated as "the aeroplane property of the Mutawakkiliyah". (Artwork by Peter Penev)

Most flying students at the RAF's No. 4 FTS at Abu Suwayr in Egypt were British or British Dominion personnel, but a significant number of the Egyptian Air Force's first pilots also gained their wings here. They, like the other students, learned on the School's Armstrong Whitworth Atlas I TM machines which were used as advanced trainers. The addition of a letter R to KR1503's original serial number of K1503 indicated that it had been rebuilt following an accident. This was a local convention only used by aircraft depots in the Middle East between 1923 and 1936, presumably to alert pilots and ground crew to possible minor handling or structural differences between a rebuilt and a standard factory-built aeroplane. (Artwork by Luca Canossa)



The Avro 618, also known as the Avro "Ten", was a licence-built Fokker FVIIB/3m and was called the "Ten" because it could carry eight passengers, plus two crew. Egypt purchased two of these machines and this example with serial number F200 was, in fact, the very first aeroplane of what became the Egyptian Army Air Force. For several years Egyptian national markings included a green and white roundel on the fuselage which also had a relatively large yellow-gold crown at approximately 9 o'clock on the outer green ring. The Avro 618 was powered by three Armstrong Siddeley Lynx IVB radial engines, while the long slender object beneath and very close to the rear fuselage is probably a handling bar. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)

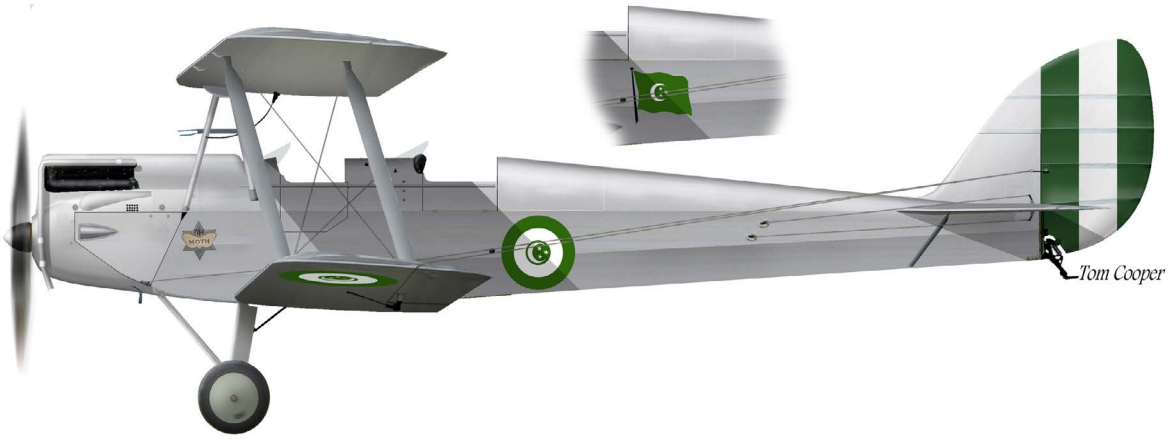
The Avro 626 was designed as a multipurpose machine for small air forces with limited resources, the first batch sold to Egypt having serial numbers J300 to J309 and being powered by an Armstrong Siddeley Cheetah V 260 hp engine. The type was a multipurpose version of the more famous Avro 621 Tutor training aeroplane with an additional third cockpit accessible from the rear flying cockpit. This third cockpit could also be fitted with a Scarff Ring to mount a machine gun, though Egyptian machines were not supplied with such a gun-mounting. Egyptian Avro 626s did, however, have wireless equipment. Another feature of the first batch of Egyptian machines was a tail-skid instead of a tail wheel, though several of these machines had tail wheels fitted later. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



Late in April 1936 the Italian government decided to donate three Caproni Ca.100 trainers to Saudi Arabia, where the aeroplanes appear to have retained their Italian markings for some time. For example, this machine still has an Italian Regia Aeronautica military serial number MM.56194. On 30 August 1936 it was damaged at Taif when Khalid Dia al-Din, one the Saudi Air Force's first pilots, suffered a low-level stall. The aeroplane was then sent for major repairs to Italian workshops in East Africa. The only known photographs of Ca.100s in Saudi service show them to have been the standard Colombo S.63 in-line engine powered version rather than the Fiat A.50 radial engine versions on which the Saudi cadets learned to fly in Italy. These photographs also show that the fuselages of the Saudi Ca.100s were painted a mid-tone colour, which was probably the mid-blue used on Regia Aeronautica trainers, though there is no sign of the red fuselage stripe seen on many Italian Ca.100 basic trainers. The Italians had, however, been informed that King Abd al-Aziz Ibn Sa'ud wanted "a diagonal sword in white on a green background" to be painted on their rudders. (Artwork by Peter Penev)

This well-used de Havilland DH.60G had been central to the gruelling de Havilland Gipsy Sealed Engine Trials and was far from being a new aeroplane when acquired by Ahmad Hasanain Pasha. Powered by a de Havilland Gipsy I engine, it retained its original British civil registration, G-EBTD and its original dark blue and silver colouring though with a new coat of paint. Writing on the sides of the fuselage relating to the Sealed Engine Trials was replaced by the name *Princess Faiqa*, who was one of King Fu'ad of Egypt's daughters. During Ahmad Hasanain's attempted flight from England to Cairo, this name was largely obscured by a spare propeller strapped to the side of the fuselage. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)

Iraq's first military aeroplanes were de Havilland DH.60G Gipsy Moths, an upgraded version of the original 60 hp DH. 60 Cirrus Moth. Iraqi Gipsy Moths had desert survival equipment, including a tank for drinking water. Painted an overall silver aluminium dope, each also had a large serial number on both sides of the front of the fuselage, in this case number 3. While the Royal Iraqi Air Force's tail markings were relatively orthodox vertical green, white, red and black stripes, markings on the fuselage and wings were very unusual. They consisted of a black outlined green triangle with a stylised Arabic letter *jim* in red, plus a small white diamond in the lower part of this letter. The engine is a 100 hp de Havilland Gipsy II, driving a wooden propeller with a small silver spinner. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)

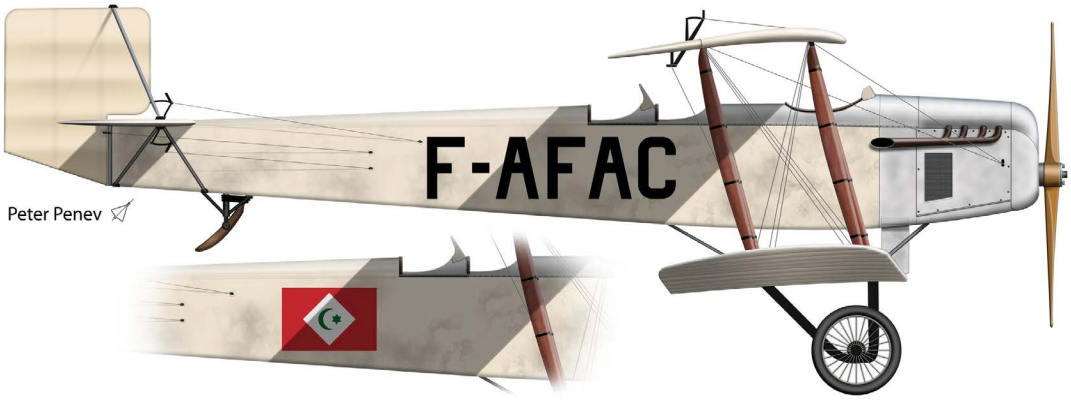


The DH.60T or "Moth Trainer" was a modified version of the DH.60G designed for military use. The inner wing bracing wires were rearranged to make it easier for pilots wearing parachutes to get in and out of the front cockpit. These aeroplanes were also fitted with full dual controls and radios, while those purchased by Egypt would have racks for small bombs fitted after arrival in Egypt. Powered by the same extremely reliable de Havilland Gipsy II engines as Iraqi DH.60s, the exhaust pipes were rearranged so that they went vertically down from the left side of the front of the engine instead of having the long horizontal exhaust pipe of the standard civilian DH.60G. The footsteps to inspect the engine and to get in or out of the cockpits were changed, while the control-wires for the rudder were doubled and held close to the sides of the fuselage. A different form of Egyptian national markings had originally been given to these machines, consisting of Egyptian flags rather than the roundels which were applied before their actual delivery flight (see inset). (Artwork by Tom Cooper)

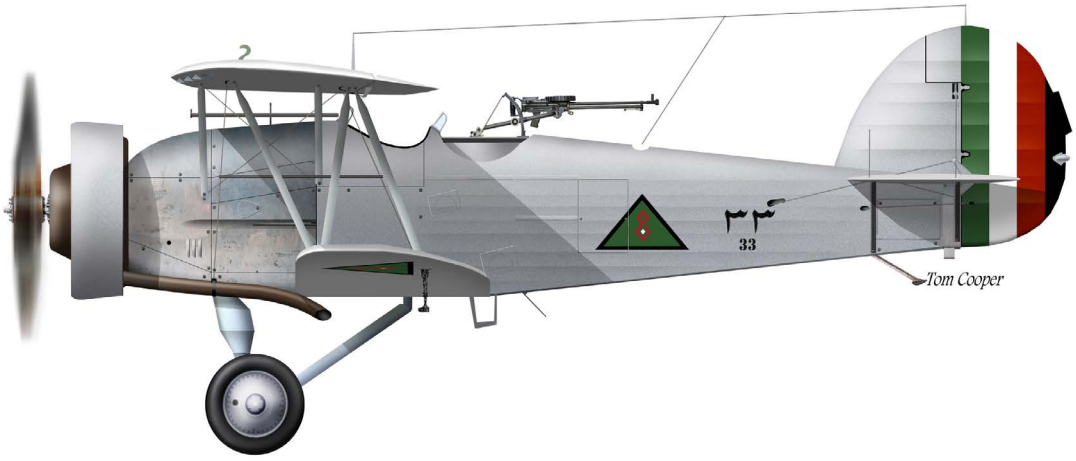
The first Iraqi DH.80A Puss Moth had its serial number 10 written in black European numerals on the rear fuselage, though this was later changed to Arabic numerals (see inset) like those of subsequent Iraqi Puss Moths. It was a fast, three-seat, high-wing monoplane with an enclosed cabin which was primarily intended for transport duties. However, Puss Moths equipped with wireless, cameras and racks for four 20lb bombs, were soon in action against assorted insurgents. In fact, their inverted engines gave pilots improved forward vision and meant that, despite being a civilian design, the DH.80A proved particularly effective in low-level attacks against ground targets. (Artwork by Peter Penev)

Powered by two Gipsy Major engines, the de Havilland DH.84A Dragon Type Colonial could carry 12 or 16 20lb bombs, a Lewis machine gun in a mid-upper gunner-observer's position, and sometimes two other machine guns in the nose. The hooped metal bar immediately behind the mid-upper gunner's position was to stop the gunner from hitting his own machine. By now the Royal Iraqi Air Force had settled upon a system of showing serial numbers in large Arabic and smaller European numerals (in this case 23). The machine also has a long hook to pick up messages from Army units in the field, mounted beneath its fuselage. (Artwork by Peter Penev)

This particular German Dietrich DP.IIa Bussard training aeroplane, registration D-0736 (c.n. 168), was one of two used by foreign students including the Egyptian Abd al-Hamid Ahmad Efendi when he learned to fly at the Flugschule Bornemann at Staaken outside Berlin in the mid- to late 1920s. The other Dietrich DP.IIa at this Flugschule was D-0380 (c.n. unknown), while a third Dietrich D.IIa previously used at the school at at Staaken aerodrome (D-644, c.n. 137) no longer seems to have been available. This aeroplane has overall clear-doped fabric, including the wheel discs, rather than the overall blue colour-scheme of some earlier Bornemann machines. The dark – probably black but possibly red – paint on the rudder probably covered up information about the Flugschule Bornemann which had been transferred from the tail to the sides of the fuselage. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



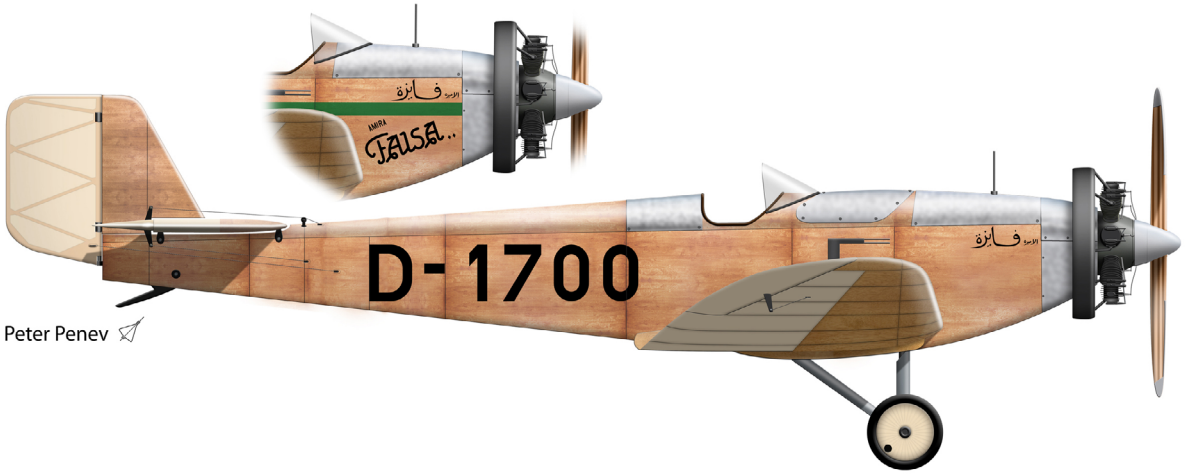
The sturdy and useful Dorand A.R.2 was designed in 1916. The rear cockpits of several were later remodelled in the process of civilianising the machines and making them into three-seaters after the First World War. The French-Algerian SRAT company purchased seven and in April 1922 started a passenger service between Algiers and Biskra. However, this venture was a failure and six Dorand A.R.2s then remained in their hangers until one (almost certainly SRAT Nº 4 with the French civil registration F-AFAC) was secretly sold to the Rif Republic, which had risen again Spanish authority in northern Morocco. All markings were removed, except for the French registration letters, before the aeroplane was flown to northern Morocco. Its whereabouts remained unknown until Spanish aeroplanes spotted the Dorand, camouflaged with tree branches at Tizzi-Moren near Al Hoceima on 21 March 1924. An intensive two-day Spanish bombing assault seriously damaged or destroyed the Rifian aeroplane which never flew operationally for the Rif Republic. It is also unlikely to have been given the hypothetical insignia of the Rif Aviation Corps (see inset). (Artwork by Peter Penev)



The Hawker Nisr or "Iraqi Audax" differed from the standard RAF Hawker Audax in several respects, the most important of which were its Bristol Pegasus II M2 engine and broad balloon tyres for desert operations. This machine probably formed part of No. 3 Squadron and had standard Iraqi national markings with the Arabic serial number 33 on its rear fuselage, repeated in small stencilled European numbers underneath. Armed with a Lewis machine gun for the observer-gunner, it also has under-wing racks to carry bombs or desert stores. Beneath the fuselage is a long message "pick-up" hook. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)

In 1927 the Junkers company sold an A.35 two-seater and an F.13 six-seater transport to the Kingdom of Yemen, both powered by Junkers L5 engines. The Yemeni A.35 also had a simple protective "hoop" supported by a sloping strut between the two cockpits, rather than the more elaborate cage-like "anti-roll" bars seen on some other machines. In fact, the Yemeni government wanted the A.35 to be converted into an armed K.53, a version of the Junkers A.35 developed in Sweden. However, there is no evidence that either of these Junkers were given Yemeni markings and the A.35 (construction number 1090) still had its German civilian registration D-1171 when it was destroyed in a crash on 3 October 1927. The Junkers F.13 probably retained its German registration even after it was put into storage, where it remained until the 1960s. (Artwork by Peter Penev)

In 1926 the Egyptian businessman Hassan Anis Pasha planned to fly his Junkers F.13 single-engine seaplane (c.n. 766) to Egypt himself, but British objections resulted in the machine languishing for months at Pireus, the port of Athens. Officially it belonged to the Arabia Trading Company and had large green and white Egyptian flags painted on its wings and rudder. The name *Anisah* or *Anishu* was written in black on the fuselage. As was normal with Junkers' aeroplanes, the manufacturer's name was also written on the side of the engine compartment, but this time it was thickly underlined, which was rather unusual. (Artwork by Peter Penev)

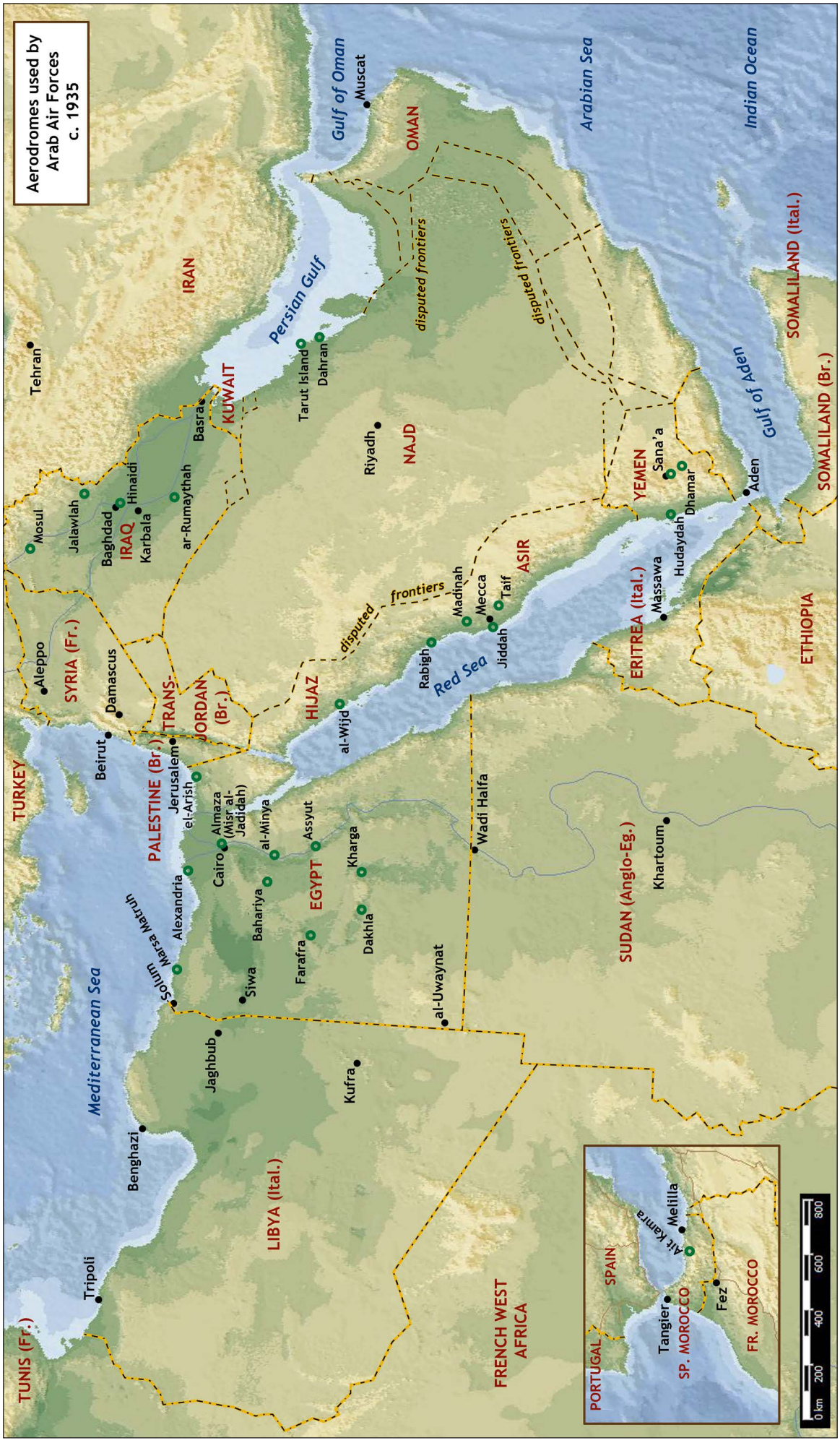


The Klemm Kl 25 IIa (c.n. 172) flown by Muhammad Sidqi from Berlin to Cairo was a standard machine which still had its German civil registration D-1700 at the time of the flight. The only difference was that the engine of Sidqi's aeroplane had a large bare-metal spinner and a darkened or perhaps bronzed metal exhaust ring slightly to the rear of its 40 hp Salmson AD.9 nine-cylinder air-cooled radial engine. The front cockpit was also temporarily covered with an aluminium sheet for this epic journey. The name *Amirah Fayzah*, who was another of King Fu'ad's daughters, was painted on the aeroplane before it flew from Berlin to Cairo. This name was later repeated in larger European lettering on the lower part of the front of the fuselage, and a green stripe was also added along the fuselage, probably when the Klemm was being used by Misr Airwork (see inset). (Artwork by Peter Penev)

Amongst the aeroplanes which Italy supplied to Yemen in 1926 were one, or perhaps two, dual-control trainer versions of the SAML S.2, powered by a 120 hp Le Rhone rotary engine. The First World War SAML S.2 reconnaissance machine had been an uprated copy of the German Aviatik B.I. The instillation of a different engine resulted in considerable alteration to the shape of the fuselage ahead of the wings, a repositioning of some flying wires and a small repositioning of the front undercarriage struts. In the trainer version the rear cockpit was also moved forward to improve communications between instructor and pupil. The brightly red-painted rudder has a white Arabic inscription stating that this aeroplane was the property of Yemen's ruling Mutawakkili dynasty. A substantial part of the side of the fuselage is also painted red, bearing an Arabic inscription which was, in fact, a short form of the Islamic Declaration of Faith which could be translated as "*No God but God and Muhammad is the Prophet of God*". There are no markings on the wings. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)

The Spartan Cruiser 2 purchased by Iraq Airwork Ltd. in February 1933 was the first aeroplane to receive an Iraqi civil registration, namely YI-AAA. It was a three-engine aeroplane, the second of the type to be built, and had previously been registered in the UK as G-ACBM. The Spartan Cruiser could carry six passengers, plus the pilot and had been designed for comfort as well as high speed. It was originally powered by three ADC Cirrus Hermes IV in-line aero-engines, but these seem to have been replaced by inverted Gipsy Major engines before the Cruiser was sold to Iraq. For a while YI-AAA was used on an experimental air route between Baghdad and Mosul, and in fact the Spartan Company had hoped it would be the first of a larger Iraqi fleet. However, no more were purchased and YI-AAA was returned to the UK in June 1934. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)

On 25 August, Britain agreed to supply four Westland Wapiti general purpose aeroplanes to the Saudi government. These were either Mk. I machines like those earlier supplied to the Hijazi Air Force, some of which were now in Saudi service, or were early production Mk. II machines. They came from RAF stocks in neighbouring Iraq, along with a thousand 20lb bombs, and were powered by Bristol Jupiter VI engines. No guns seem to have been supplied, nor were mountings for the observers' gun visible on the rear cockpits. The upper surface and top of the fuselage were still painted light grey, as in RAF service, but all other British markings had been removed. Nor did Saudi Wapitis have the high visibility red wingtips and tailplanes seen on RAF machines in Iraq. The few available photographs show that at least one Westland Wapiti had a serial number starting with the letter S written beneath its lower left wing, though not beneath the right wing, and on the rudder. These markings were certainly black. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)


Aerodromes used by Arab Air Forces c. 1935
Mediterranean Sea
Persian Gulf
Gulf of Oman
Arabian Sea
Indian Ocean
Red Sea
Gulf of Aden
TURKEY
IRAN
IRAQ
KUWAIT
OMAN
NAJD
YEMEN
ASIR
HIJAZ
TRANS-JORDAN (Br.)
PALESTINE (Br.)
SYRIA (Fr.)
EGYPT
LIBYA (Ital.)
TUNIS (Fr.)
FRENCH WEST AFRICA
SUDAN (Anglo-Eg.)
ERITREA (Ital.)
ETHIOPIA
SOMALILAND (Ital.)
SOMALILAND (Br.)
SPAIN
PORTUGAL
SP. MOROCCO
FR. MOROCCO
disputed frontiers
disputed frontiers
disputed frontiers
Tehran
Tarut Island
Dahran
Muscat
Riyadh
Sana'a
Aden
Dhamar
Hudaydah
Massawa
Khartoum
Wadi Halfa
Mosul
Jalawlah
Baghdad
Hinaidi
Karbala
ar-Rumaythah
Basra
Aleppo
Damascus
Beirut
Jerusalem
el-Arish
Almaza (Misr al-Jadidah)
Cairo
Alexandria
Mersa Matruh
Siwa
Bahariya
Farafra
Dakhla
Kharga
Assyut
al-Minya
al-Wijid
Rabigh
Madinah
Mecca
Taif
Jiddah
Tripoli
Benghazi
Jaghbub
Kufra
al-Uwaynat
Melilla
Ait Kamra
Tangier
Fez
0 km 200 400 600 800

A de Havilland Puss Moth of the Royal Iraqi Air Force in Iraq. Lacking a serial number it was probably the first of this type to be delivered alongside the first DH.60M Moths. (Albert Grandolini collection)

the RAF personnel involved in training, were covered by the Iraqi government.

Iraq's first military aeroplanes were hardly military at all, which was a matter of deep disappointment to the first Iraqi pilots. They were an upgraded version of the original 60hp de Havilland DH.60 Cirrus Moth, now powered by a 100hp de Havilland Gipsy engine. The specific version sold to Iraq is usually stated to be the DH.60M, or 'Metal Moth', but de Havilland records seem to indicate that the first batch of five machines consisted of DH.60G 'Gipsy Moths' with de Havilland Gipsy II engines. The two-seater Moth biplane had been strongly recommended as a suitable first type by the British Military Mission in Iraq. Furthermore, Moths were currently the only machines which the British government was prepared to sell to Iraq and Egypt in any numbers.

The Gipsy Moth was regarded as "very suitable for light reconnaissance and offensive duties"; four of them were fitted with light bomb racks, perhaps as a stop-gap measure. Thereafter, it was anticipated that the Gipsy Moths would continue to be used as trainers after more potent aircraft had been acquired. These Iraqi Gipsy Moths were also fitted with tanks for drinking water, plus various other bits of desert survival equipment. In addition, the Iraqis purchased one de Havilland DH.80A Puss Moth, a relatively high speed, three-seater, high-wing monoplane with an enclosed cabin, which would be used for transport duties.

When the first Iraqi pilots learned what they would be flying they were far from happy. There was no hiding the fact that the Gipsy Moth was essentially a civilian aeroplane and remained unarmed apart from the four machines which carried racks for light anti-personnel bombs. They were clearly incapable of air combat. What the Iraqis really wanted was either the Hawker Hart or, better still, the Armstrong Whitworth Atlas, which had been designed for British 'colonial' operations.

Unaware that the British refused to supply such weaponry to Iraq, the young pilots tended to blame their own government for their feeble machines. On the other hand, they were led to believe that the addition of bomb racks and subsequently of message-grabbing hooks beneath the fuselages was a result of their own urging. According to some sources, however, these modifications not only increased the costs but delayed the delivery date – which may or may not be true. All these de Havilland Moths were eventually handed over to the Iraqi Commissioner (ambassador) to the United Kingdom at an official ceremony on 1 March 1931, attended by a large group of invited Iraqis, other dignitaries and the press corps. A month earlier, King Faisal of Iraq had taken delivery of another DH.80A Puss Moth (c.n. 2148) for his own personal use.

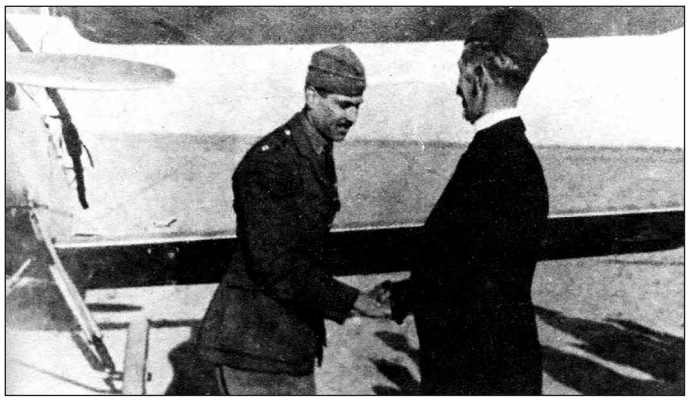
The five newly trained Iraqi pilots selected to fly the Gipsy Months to Baghdad were *Mulazim Awal Tayyar* (First Lieutenant Pilot) Muhamad Ali Jawad – who, being slightly older, was also in command of his colleagues, *Mulazim Awal Tayyar* Natiq Muhammad al-Tay, *Mulazim Awal Tayyar* Musa Ali, *Mulazim Awal Tayyar* Akram Mushtaq and *Mulazim Tayyar* (Second Lieutenant Pilot) Hafzi Aziz. These men were photographed in front of their Moths wearing RAF-issue flying clothes. Meanwhile, an RAF officer named Carter was to fly the Puss Moth.

Thus, five Gipsy Moths and one Puss Moth set off from de Havilland's aerodrome at Hatfield, north of London, on 8 April 1931, headed for Paris, the first of numerous stops because of the aeroplanes' limited range. Their departure was reported by the British press; this was going to be an epic journey for such very recently qualified young men in small aircraft. Their route took them via Paris, Lyon, Marseilles, Milan, Zagreb, Belgrade, Istanbul, Aleppo and Ramadi, before they reached Baghdad on 22 April.

Welcomed with considerable hospitality as well as official receptions at each of their stopovers, the most lavish of these breaks were in Yugoslavia and Turkey. The pilots spent three days in Istanbul as guests of the Turkish government and also attended a special ceremony held in their honour by the Turkish Aviation Society. Several of the staging posts had been selected with a view to providing some element of relaxation for the young airmen. Inevitably, the entire journey became something of a propaganda exercise for the Iraqi government, a fact clearly noted in Egypt, which was Iraq's rival for leadership of the Arab world.

At Ramadi, the first stop in their own country, the Iraqi aviators were greeted by a large crowd of local people led by the regional governor, followed by a traditional Arab banquet provided by the Ramadi municipality. Finally, the planes arrived outside Baghdad and landed at al-Washash (al-Muthana) aerodrome, where they were greeted by an even larger gathering led by King Faisal of Iraq, ex-King Ali of the Hijaz, their brother Prince Zaid Ibn Husain, Crown Prince Ghazi, government ministers, officials and other

The RIrAF's first squadron of de Havilland DH.60M Moths and their pilots lined up next to an Iraqi flag. The photograph was probably taken in Iraq shortly after their arrival from the United Kingdom. (Iraqi Air Force archive)



Crown Prince Ghazi greeting one of the pilots (probably Mulazim Tayar Hafzi Aziz) of the RIrAF's first flight of de Havilland DH.60s after they arrived at al-Washash (al-Muthana) aerodrome outside Baghdad on 22 April 1931. (Iraqi Air Force archive)

Hinaidi aerodrome photographed from a height of 60 metres by an RAF aeroplane in March 1924. It would become the RIrAF's first home, but still had to be shared with the British until 1938. (Iraqi Air Force archive)

dignitaries. Every school in Baghdad had reportedly given its pupils a holiday, and the road from the airport to the Ministry of Defence was lined with cheering, flower-throwing children and adults. Thereafter, 22 April became an annual celebration to mark the official creation of the Royal Iraqi Air Force.

This first unit, which was as yet a flight rather than a full squadron, was based at al-Hinaidi aerodrome – later to be renamed Mu'askar al-Rashid – on the outskirts of Baghdad. One of the first things that men posted to Hinaidi noticed was the huge number of very noisy frogs which lived in the area. However, they also soon realised that these creatures were a blessing rather than a problem, being encouraged to breed in the local marshes, irrigation channels and pools in order to keep down the far more troublesome mosquitoes. For Iraqi personnel, Hinaidi would have been a pleasant posting, being only a few kilometres outside the capital.

Alfred Earle provided a detailed account of Hinaidi, as it appeared to an Englishman:

> It was an oasis in the middle of the desert. It was a big cantonment. There were two squadrons there, an aircraft depot, a big hospital, headquarters of the works service for the country. It was the main cantonment in Iraq in those days. And it was surrounded – on the edge of the river – by a bund [dyke] to keep out the floods which occasionally happened, which included the aerodrome and the cantonment. It was very dusty. There were spots of cultivation. Every mess had its own garden and its own gardener used to irrigate it every day unfailingly to keep something growing. We had two lawns I remember each about, oh, fifteen feet square. And one was flooded one day while we used the other and the next day that was flooded and we went back to the one that had been flooded the day before. That was the only way one could keep [the lawns] green there. And, of course, it was very hot in summer. And you saw very little rain all the year around.

It was not long before the newly created RIrAF was thrown into action against Kurdish dissidents in the north of the country. The RIrAF's involvement lasted from 21-27 October 1931, and although it consisted only of dropping leaflets over rebel areas, it did provide the country's first air and ground crews with useful experience. Once again Alfred Earle, who at the time had been a Flying Officer, offered his considered opinion of his opposite numbers, the first officers of the RIrAF: "The nucleus were three Iraqis who were actually at Cranwell [the RAF College] with me, same time as I was, as flight cadets. And after they'd finished their training at Cranwell they went back and started forming the Iraqi Air Force … and occasionally one of them would be attached to us."

Turning to the time when *Mulazim Thani* Husain Janabi was attached to No. 55 Squadron, Earle continued: "He'd be behaving just like an ordinary squadron pilot. Same sort of thing as we were doing, inspecting landing grounds, bombing practice, air gunnery, normal training." On the size of the RIrAF at this time, Earle noted:

"They just had this one, well, in our language it was a Flight of, as I say, relatively light aircraft. They had an RAF squadron leader commanding them and the rest of the personnel were Iraqis. And they were busy of course training up their airmen."

On his impression of the young Iraqi officers, Earle commented:

> Oh, they were good chaps and quite reasonable pilots. Quite good pilots. Unfortunately after they got back and started their own Air Force going they inevitably got mixed up in politics … They had their own mess. They would visit us and we would occasionally visit them, particularly the two or three of us who'd been at Cranwell with them. But they had their own mess and it was run on entirely Iraqi lines.

RAF air-gunner Spencer Viles was more critical and betrayed the racist prejudices of the time: "Now their air force was a different proposition, they were English trained, their officers and it passed on. They were a different proposition entirely, they were quite smart." On these first Iraqi airmen's capabilities as airmen, Viles commented:

> That's hard to say really because you've got to fly with them for a certain length of time to find out exactly what they are … I didn't think, although they were English trained, the mentality of them and the substance of them, the backbone of them, was not like a Britisher, it just wasn't there. And I would think in a tight squeeze they'd do anything to get out … They lacked tenacity, they lacked forcefulness, they lacked the leadership that was needed for their lesser rank people.

Where the RIrAF officers' technical skills were concerned, Viles also offered his opinion:

> Well the officers that I knew, the two of them that were at Cranwell when I was there … Janabi was one and I forget the other fellow's name, he was also a lieutenant eventually. When I got to Iraq they were both there. They were quite good fliers those two. But the other three I met, I wasn't quite so sure about them, and I would never fly with them unless I was given a direct order. If they came and asked me to go with them, would I fly with them as a gunner or anything like that, I would have said, 'I'm sorry sir, I'm engaged' … I lacked confidence in their ability if anything really happened. Say that I was flying in a Wapiti with either of them and the engine went dead on them for some reason, I wouldn't know what he would do, he'd probably bail out straight away and leave me in there … He might try and land it, but you'd never know what he'd do with it when he tried to land it. So the first thing I would do if I got in a jam with a man like that I wouldn't give him a chance to tell me to bail out, I'd bail out and leave him to it and see what kind of a mess he'd made of it or not.

A British Air Inspector from the RAF had already been appointed to the staff of the Inspector General of the Iraqi Army, and he now had overall responsibility for the Gipsy Moths. The latter were under the somewhat nominal command of Muhammad Ali Jawad, the oldest of the young Iraqi pilots, who would remain at the head of this unit until 1933. Meanwhile, the flight had its HQ in one of the barrack blocks at Hinaidi. The main RIrAF HQ remained at al-Washash on what was then the western edge of Baghdad.

It was necessary for British officers to have a reasonable working relationship with their Iraqi colleagues, but the racist attitudes prevailing throughout British society at this time often made this difficult. Indeed, British servicemen of all ranks were quite openly told to treat Iraqi officers "like dirt". British service personnel complained that Baghdad "smelled of Wog", while some officers boasted of refusing to drink tea with an Iraqi counterpart in case the latter got the idea that he was an equal. Only later did a few British personnel recall with sorrow their lack of opportunity to get to know Iraqis and other Arabs better, having been surprised to find these people so friendly and tolerant of British bad manners.

It would not be until 1932 that Iraq's regional Arab rival, Egypt, would get its air force – a matter of deep unhappiness in Cairo. The Egyptian government's disquiet was deepened by the fact that it only took the RIrAF's first unit a year to reach what its British mentors considered fully operational status. In 1932, Iraq took delivery of four more DH.60 Moths which had been

RIrAF DH.60M Moths in flight over mountainous terrain in northern or eastern Iraq. Only the closest has a large visible serial number, 3, which might indicate that the other two were more recently delivered replacement aircraft. (Iraqi Air Force archive)

Al-Liwa al-Rakan Ibrahim Hamdi al-Rawi, an experienced Iraqi ex-Ottoman infantry officer, was placed at the head of the yet to be formally established Royal Iraqi Air Force on 2 April 1932. (Iraqi Air Force archive)

ordered late in 1931. These were perhaps the DH.60M version known as the 'Metal Moth', though some records still refer to them as Gipsy Moths. Rather than being flown all the way from the United Kingdom, they were sent in crates by sea to Egypt, where the Egyptian government agreed that the machines could be assembled on the RAF base at Abu Qir near Alexandria. Having duly been assembled and tested, they flew from Abu Qir to Heliopolis outside Cairo on 24 January.

A second group of Iraqi pilots had earlier been selected and sent to RAF Cranwell in England for training. They graduated in 1931 before sailing to Egypt to fly this second batch of DH.60 Moths to Iraq. Their route took them via Palestine and Transjordan, before heading across the desert towards Baghdad. All went well until the Moths hit bad weather. *Mulazim Tayyar* Majd al-Din Abd al-Rahman al-Naqib then became separated from his colleagues, lost his way and made a heavy forced landing. However, the three others arrived outside the Iraqi capital on 27 January 1932, raising the strength of the RIrAF to eight Gipsy (or Metal) Moths and one Puss Moth.

Meanwhile, training the 50 Iraqi air mechanics continued, and on 2 April 1932, Lieutenant Colonel Ibrahim Hadi al-Rawi, an experienced Iraqi infantry officer born in Baghdad in 1895, was placed at the head of the RIrAF. He had earlier been an officer in the Ottoman Army and would remain commander of the Royal Iraqi Air Force until 17 November 1933. On the same day that al-Rawi took command, the RIrAF's first two flights began further operations against Kurdish dissidents in northern Iraq, who were led by Shaikh Mahmud Barzanji. These operations against what the Iraqi government called 'the First Barzanji Movement' would continue until 30 June 1932. The day after al-Rawi took command, a junior officer named Nadhir Munir Hilmi Muhi al-Din volunteered for the RIrAF. Born in Baghdad in 1914, he would also become Commander of the Royal Iraqi Air Force, though not until 1965.

The early part of 1932 was marred by fatal accidents in the DH.60 Moths during training and on operations. The first incident was on 18 February, when *Mulazim Tayyar* Abd al-Wahid Hilmy crashed into the River Tigris and was killed while flying at low altitude over Baghdad. The second came on 19 April, when *Mulazim Awal Tayyar* Natiq Muhammad Khalil al-Tay crashed while carrying out low-level reconnaissance of Mount Shirin, in an area controlled by Barzanji's Kurdish dissidents. Both al-Tay and his observer, *Jundi Awal* (Private First Class) Sa'id Abbas, were killed, thereby becoming the RIrAF's first combat fatalities.

The third batch of aeroplanes to be purchased for the RIrAF consisted of three additional Puss Moths (c.n. 2224-2226), which were given RIrAF serial numbers 10–12. They left Britain on 12 April 1932, following the flightpath of the first batch of Gipsy Moths, but travelled more quickly, arriving outside Baghdad on 20 April. The Puss Moths were then formed into a third flight, following which the three units were brought together as No. 1 Squadron RIrAF based at Hinaidi. Administratively, however, the Puss Moths still formed the nucleus of an anticipated separate squadron, and further down the line two new squadrons were to be equipped with Hawker Audaxes powered by Bristol Pegasus engines. Designed specifically for the Iraqis, this aeroplane was called a Hawker Nisr.

A Hawker Nisr or "Iraqi Audax" of the RIrAF. serial number 28. It was almost certainly photographed over England before being delivered to Iraq. (Iraqi Air Force archive)

The Puss Moths, equipped with wireless, cameras and racks for four 20lb bombs, were soon sent into action, supporting the Iraqi Army and the British RAF against insurgents. These machines had an inverted engine, the first de Havilland type to do so, which gave the pilots greatly improved forward vision. It also meant that, despite being an essentially civilian design, they proved effective in low-level attacks against ground targets – just the sort of operation that

the RIrAF now found itself carrying out against Kurdish tribes which, again encouraged by Shaikh Mahmud Barzanji, were refusing to pay taxes. Eventually, Barzanji and his entourage fled across the frontier into the Kurdish regions of south-east Turkey. Although most strikes against Kurdish targets had been carried out by the RAF, the RIrAF's first active operations were judged effective enough for the Iraqi government to plan a significant expansion of the country's air arm.

These events put the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930 into practice, and the experience thus gained would be fundamental to the Joint Iraq-Britain Defence Plan of 1940. In October 1932, Iraq had also been admitted to the League of Nations, formally ending the British mandate and recognising the nation's independence. In reality, it would remain a quasi-independent state for many years, with several RAF squadrons continuing to be based in Iraq: Nos. 30, 55, 70 and 84 at Dhibban (Habbaniya), and No. 203 – with its Short Rangoon flying boats – at Basra close to the Persian Gulf.

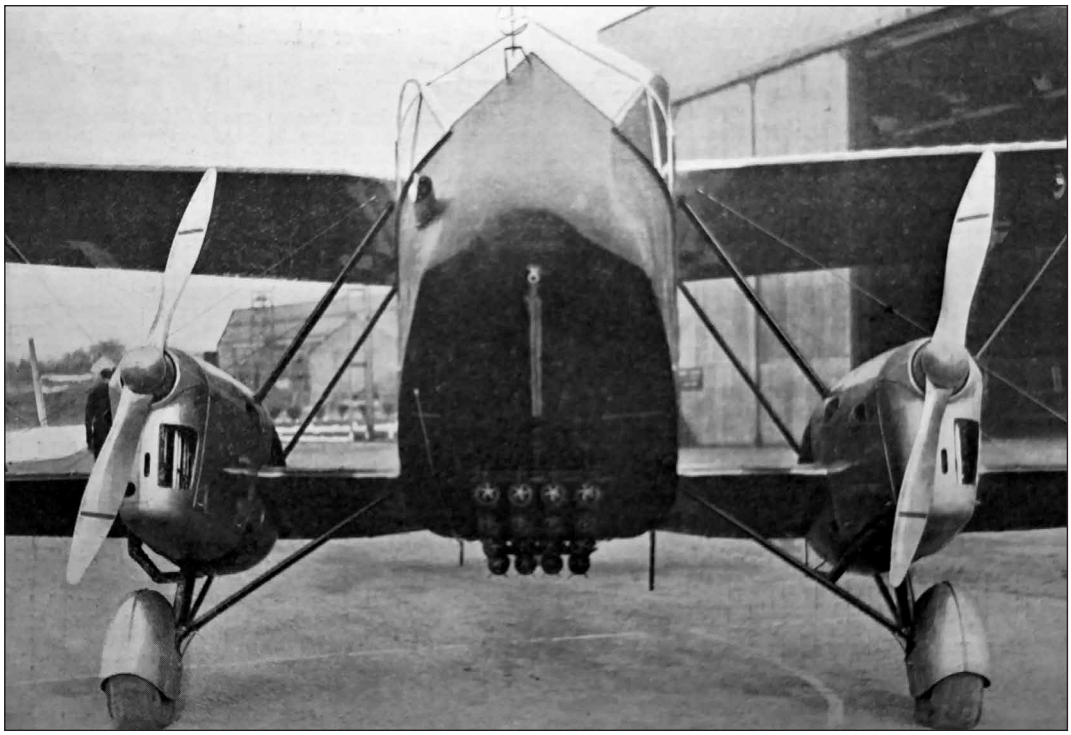
Three Iraqi airmen and two British advisors attached to the RIrAF enjoying a picnic lunch next to an Iraqi Hawker Nisr, number 33. The presence of several apparent wine bottles might indicate that the photograph was taken in England before the aircraft was delivered to the Middle East, or perhaps during that journey. (Iraqi Air Force archive)

One of the Royal Iraqi Air Force's second batch of de Havilland DH.80A Puss Moths in service in Iraq. Whereas the country's first DH.60M Moths had serial numbers on the front of the fuselage, the Puss Moths had theirs on the rear fuselage, in this case number 10. (Iraqi Air Force archive)

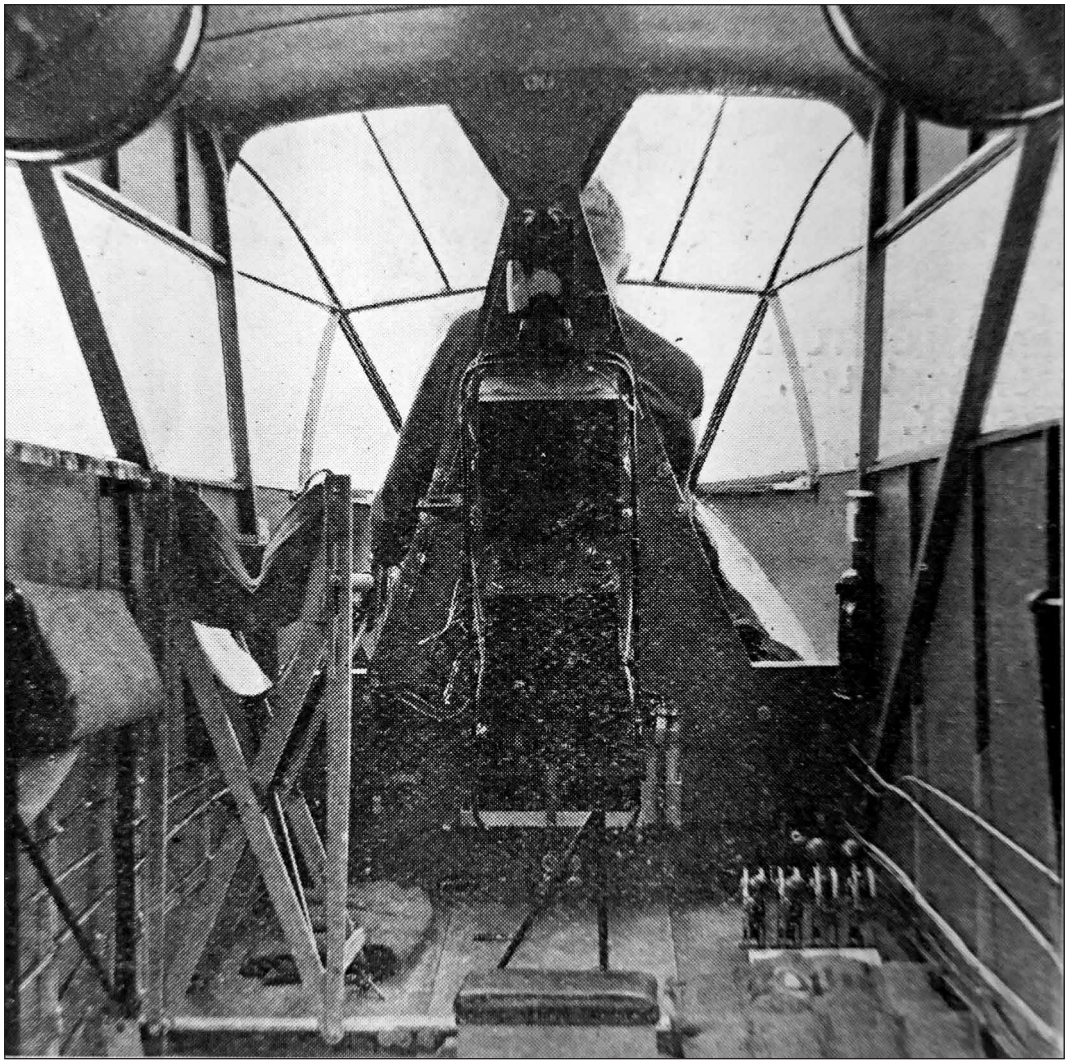
In May 1933, King Faisal chartered an Imperial Airways plane to fly himself and his advisors to the capitals of Transjordan and Egypt, apparently for inter-Arab discussions. This was followed by a state visit to Cairo in July, then to Gaza in Palestine, where Faisal stopped for breakfast, before travelling to London for another state visit. Here, King Faisal told the British government of his concern about increasing violence between Arabs and Zionist settlers in Palestine. He also asked that Jewish immigration and land purchases be reduced. The Iraqi monarch's next stop was Bern in Switzerland for one of his regular health checks, but there, on 8 September 1933, he suddenly died at the age of 48. Apparently healthy when he arrived, King Faisal Ibn Husayn Ibn Ali al-Hashemi was said to have suffered a heart attack, and almost immediately there were rumours that he had been poisoned with arsenic. Some of these stories seemed to have a strong foundation, but whatever the truth, his body was quickly embalmed before being taken back to Iraq for burial in the Royal Mausoleum at Adhamiyah in Baghdad.

Faisal I was succeeded by his son, King Ghazi. There was already simmering anti-British sentiment in several sections of Iraqi society, including parts of the army and even in the small but elite air force. Indeed, King Ghazi himself is believed to have been eager to remove the British military presence, or at least to balance an over-powerful British influence by cultivating other international connections. Meanwhile, No. 1 Squadron contributed to the containment and eventual defeat of what the Iraqi government called the 'Second Barzanji Movement' in northern Iraq. This had been a further outburst of resistance or rebellion by Kurdish dissidents, and No. 1 Squadron's participation in the Iraqi Army's campaign lasted from 8 April to 30 June 1933.

The DH.60 Moths of No. 1 Squadron's Second Flight were now withdrawn from the roster to be handed over to a Training Flight which later became the RIrAF Aviation School. From then on, No. 1 Squadron had to operate with only two flights, the First Flight still using DH.60G or DH.60M Moths while the Second Flight had Puss Moths. Furthermore, 1933 saw changes to the structure and administration of the RIrAF as it prepared for significant expansion. Several of these changes came into force by government decree on 22 June 1933, when the Air Force Commander also received his new title as Commander of the Royal Iraqi Air Force. Having previously formed part of the Iraqi



A de Havilland DH.84 Dragon, known as the Type Colonial built for the Royal Iraqi Air Force, outside the de Havilland factory in Hatfield. It is seen here in factory finish, before Iraqi marking were applied, but showing a forward-firing gun and bomb rack beneath the front fuselage. (de Havilland publicity photograph in 1933)



The interior of the cockpit of a DH.84 Dragon Type Colonial built for the RIrAF, showing the pilot's position and floor mounted bomb release handles on the right. (de Havilland publicity photograph in 1933)

Army Staff, the RIrAF staff was henceforth to be autonomous, though this perhaps over-ambitious decision would be reversed on 31 January 1934.

On 18 November 1933, the RIrAF got a new Commander, Iraqi Army *Amid* (Brigadier General) Ismail Ibrahim Namaq, who had been born in Baghdad in 1892 and was now raised to the rank of *Fariq* (lieutenant general). He would remain in post until 18 January 1936. Meanwhile, the most senior Royal Iraqi Air Force officer was currently *Ra'is Tayyar* (Staff Captain Pilot) Akram Mushtaq. As CO of No. 1 Squadron, he became *Fariq* Namaq's assistant on 22 November 1933, with the designation of *Naqib* (staff captain).

Eight de Havilland DH.84M Dragons were also purchased for the RIrAF, a ninth or replacement machine being handed over in 1934. The DH.84M was an armed, military variant of the DH.84A, powered by two Gipsy Major engines and capable of lifting a useful bombload. With one Lewis machine gun in a mid-upper gunner-observer's position and sometimes two other guns mounted in the nose, the machines could also carry 12 or 16 20lb bombs. These Iraqi DH.84Ms were again equipped for desert operations.

The first eight Dragons were flown in formation from the United Kingdom to Iraq, arriving in Baghdad on 13 May. They would be allocated to No. 2 Squadron RIrAF, which was officially established on 1 June 1933. The new squadron's first commander was *Ra'is Tayyar* Nasir al-Janabi, who would remain in charge until 1937. Its home was again Hinaidi aerodrome on the outskirts of Baghdad, and although the unit was designated as a Transport Squadron, it was soon involved in suppressing

The first eight de Havilland DH.84 Dragons and their newly trained pilots paraded on a somewhat muddy Hatfield aerodrome prior to their delivery to Iraq. These were the first RIrAF machines to have serial numbers applied on large Arabic and smaller European numerals. Flown from the United Kingdom to Iraq, they reached Baghdad on 13 May 1933, then being allocated to No. 2 Sq. RIrAF which was officially established two weeks later. (de Havilland publicity photograph in 1933)

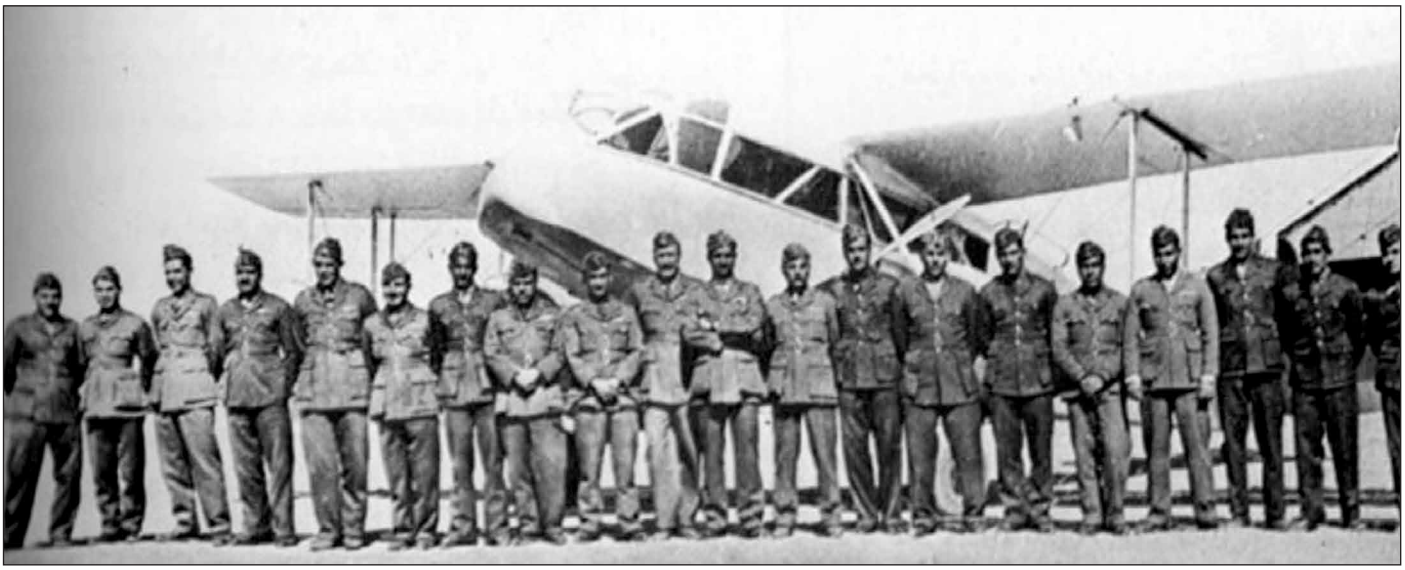
sporadic uprisings. Before that, however, No. 2 Squadron suffered its first fatal casualties on 3 June 1933, when *Mulazim Awal Tayyar* Muhammad Yassin and an NCO or trainee named Abd Allah Uthman were killed. The Dragon flown by Yassin hit another aeroplane while taking off, then crashed into a nearby valley.

Originally, the RIrAF DH.84M Dragons were given serial numbers 15-23, but it is unclear which machine was lost in this training accident, as another would soon be lost in operations. Numbers 17-23, and possibly 16, had been photographed at de Havilland's aerodrome outside Hatfield in England prior to delivery, while numbers 17-22 were also photographed in Iraq over a period of time. It seems likely that number 15 was the first loss, while number 16 was probably lost on operations on 11 September 1934.

Very shortly after reaching Iraq, the Dragons of No. 2 Squadron were thrown into action against dissident Kurds and then against Shi'a Arab dissident tribes in southern Iraq during August. Here, operations around al-Diwaniya (now the main city in the Qadisiyah governorate)

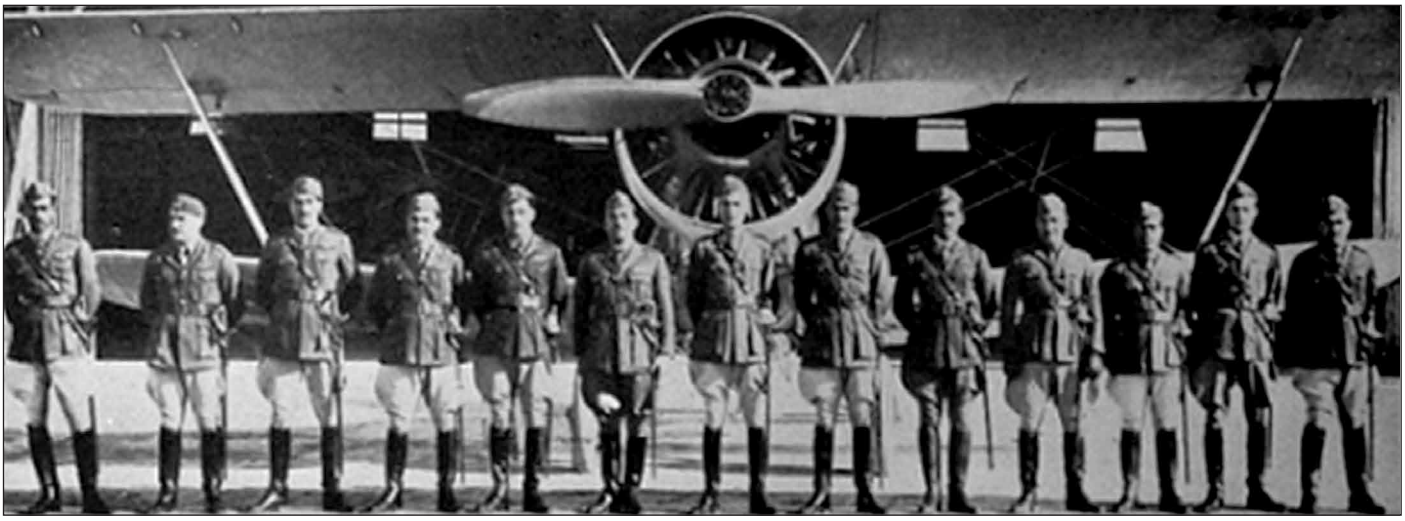
Al-Fariq Ismail Ibrahim Namaq, an Army officer, was made Commanding Officer of the RIrAF on 18 November 1933 because there was not yet an Iraqi Air Force officer senior enough for this position. (Iraqi Air Force archive)

Akram Mushtaq later in his career when he had the rank of Al-Aqid al-Tayar. Having been Commanding Officer of No. 1 Sq., Mushtaq was made assistant to the RIrAF's CO, Al-Fariq Namaq on 22 November 1933. (Iraqi Air Force archive)



de Havilland Dragon of the Royal Iraqi Air Force with the crews of the first Dragon squadron in Iraq. (Albert Grandolini collection)

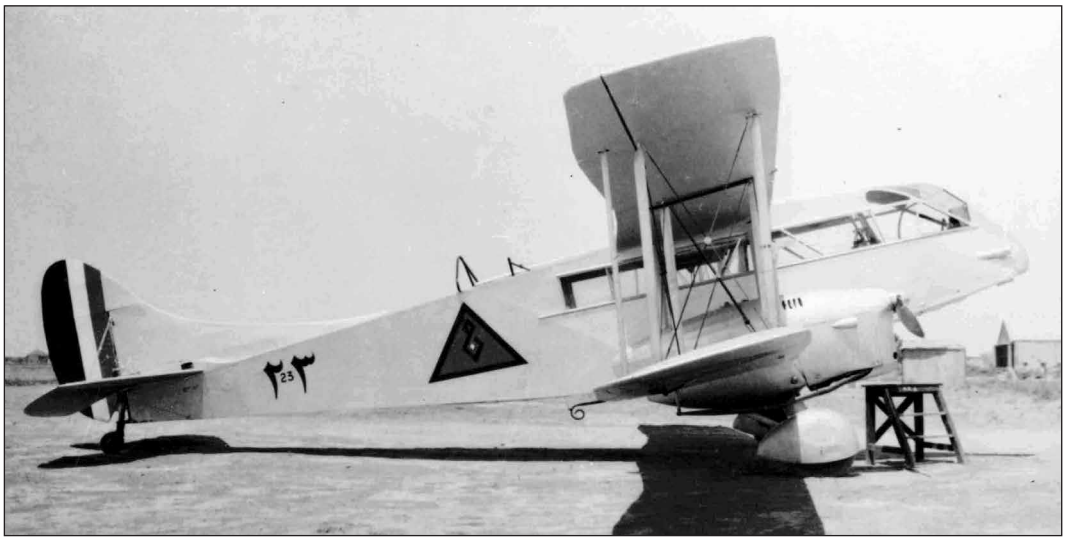
A representative line-up of Iraqi military aeroplanes, probably at Hinaidi in late 1934 or 1935. They include a DH.80A serial number 12, four DH.84 Dragons and what appears to be a full squadron of newly acquired Hawker Nisrs, otherwise known as "Iraqi Audaxes". (Iraqi Air Force archive)



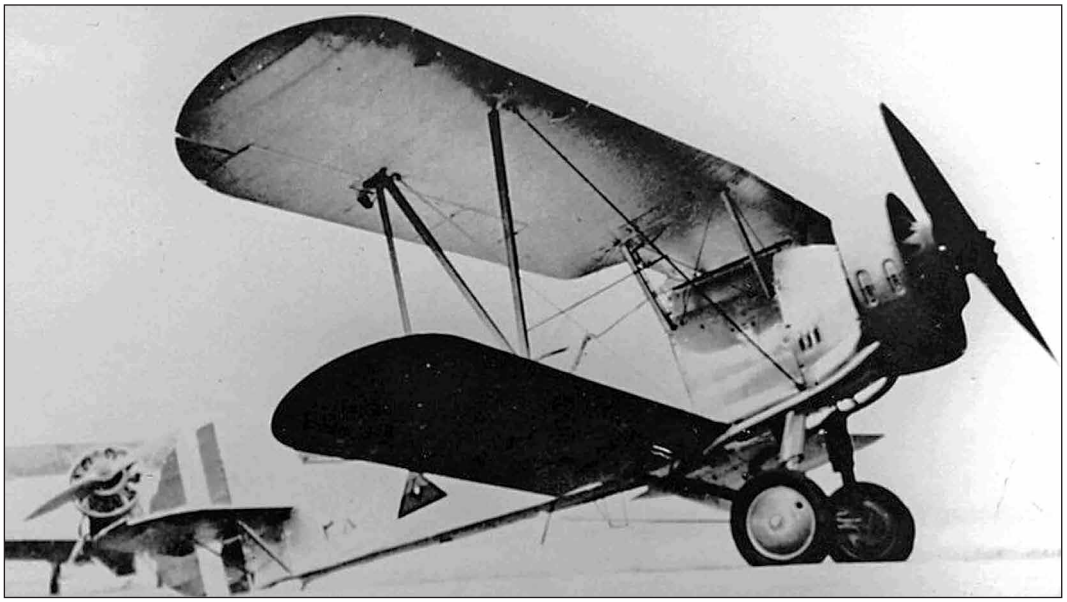
Officers of Iraq's first unit of Hawker Nisrs, No. 3 Squadron, parading in front of one of their aircraft. No. 3 came into existence on 1 October 1934 and was an army cooperation unit based at Hinaidi, under the command of Naqib Akram Mushtaq. (Iraqi Air Force archive)

and Rumaythah (south-east of the city of Najaf) were under the command of the Iraqi Army's most senior active officer, General Bakr Sidqi, who would later lead a military coup in 1936. For this large-scale military effort, all the RIrAF's machines were brought together as a single administrative unit consisting of two flights of Dragons and a communications flight with Puss Moths, plus the two training flights of DH.60 Moths.

It was during these events that the RIrAF suffered its next operational fatalities when the de Havilland Dragon flown by *Mulazim Tayyar* Ahmad al-Nasiri crashed about 5km north-east of Hinaidi aerodrome. Al-Nasiri is believed to have lost control when he met serious turbulence. As a result, he was killed along with *Mulazim Tayyar* Hassan Salih al-Duhi, *Na'ib Darbat Tayyar* (Warrant Officer Pilot) Mazhar Fahmi, *Arif Bundaqi* (Sergeant) Nasif Jasim and *Jundi Awal* (Private First Class) Abd al-Wahab Ali. It was the first time that a group of RIrAF officers had been killed in a single accident.



A de Havilland DH.84 Dragon of the RIrAF, serial number 23, in service in Iraq. (Iraqi Air Force archive)



Two Hawker Nisrs or "Iraqi Audaxes" of the RIrAF in Iraq. The serial number of the closest, 28, show that it was in the first batch to be delivered. Indeed it had the lowest number allocated to any of the RIrAF's Nisrs. (Iraqi Air Force archive)

The appointment of *Ra'is Tayyar Naqib* (Staff Captain) Akram Mushtaq as Commanding Officer of No. 2 (Transport) Squadron, with DH.84M Dragons, on 4 September 1934 may have marked the official bringing together of the two existing Dragon flights as a numbered squadron, though Mushtaq also remained CO of No. 1 Squadron until sometime in 1936. Around five weeks later on 14 October, Akram Mushtaq was put in charge of the Iraqi part of Hinaidi (Mu'askar al-Rashid) aerodrome, which may have been when the title of Staff Officer was added to his rank. The year 1934 had, in fact, seen significant changes in the overall administration and structure of the RIrAF. Having been placed back under overall Iraqi Army command at the end of January – perhaps in anticipation of the major effort against dissidents – the RIrAF Headquarters (Directorate, Staff and Secretariat) regained its independence on 31 October 1934.

Meanwhile, Iraq had been buying additional aircraft and negotiating the purchase of others. In 1934, three de Havilland DH.83 Tiger Moths were ordered for advanced flying training inside Iraq, while some RIrAF pilots were sent to the United Kingdom to be trained as flying instructors. The first batch of what would eventually be 34 Hawker Nisrs, also called 'Iraqi Audaxes', arrived some time during 1934. The British were clearly more enthusiastic about supplying relatively advanced military equipment to Iraq than to Egypt. These Nisrs were Bristol Pegasus II M2 or V I P8 engine versions of the famous Hawker Audax Army Cooperation aeroplane used by the British RAF. Their serial numbers are believed to have been 28-61 and they would eventually form two new RIrAF squadrons.

The first to be established was No. 3 Squadron, which officially came into existence on 1 October 1934 with the arrival of the first batch of Nisrs. Based at Hinaidi under the command of *Naqib* Akram Mushtaq, it was to be an Army Cooperation unit and reached full strength during 1935 when Mushtaq handed over command to *Ra'id* (Major) Bahgat Ra'uf. However, Ra'uf, like his predecessor, would only remain in charge until the following year.

The successful military operations of summer 1934 did not end dissidence in either northern or southern Iraq. Hence, the RIrAF found itself supporting the Iraqi Army against what was called the 'First Euphrates Uprising' from 11 March until 29 July 1935, followed by action against other dissidents around al-Qurnah in the deep south from 31 August to 3 October that year. It may have been as a result of his leadership of the Dragon flights and squadron in summer 1934 and early summer 1935 that Akram Mushtaq was awarded a medal for courage on 8 August. Also in 1935, on 21 May, another young Iraqi named Abd al-Kadhim Shaikh Abadi qualified as a pilot. Born in a village in the Shamiya district of the largely Shi'a Arab Diwaniya province in 1913, Abadi would rise through the ranks to command the Royal Iraqi Air Force in 1954.

The year 1935 would be a busy time for No. 3 Squadron RIrAF. It would get a new CO in the person of *Naqib* (Captain) Majdu al-Din, who would remain in charge until 1938. Sadly, it would also see further fatalities. No. 3 Squadron took part in the suppression of the 'First Euphrates Uprising' between 11 May and 29 July, before being sent against short-lived Yazidi dissident disturbances in the Jabal Sinjar mountains of north-western Iraq, where its activities are less clear. This later disturbance concerned the largely Kurdish-speaking Yazidi religious minority community, and both Nos. 1 and 3 Squadrons were involved from 5-20 October 1935.

This was followed by a return to the south and operations against the intermittent but dangerous 'Second Euphrates Uprising', which lasted from 20 April 1935 until 1 June 1936. It

was during the latter operations that one of the squadron's Nisrs crashed into another aeroplane while landing at Jalawlah (in the Diyala river valley close to the Iranian frontier) on 15 November 1935, resulting in the death of the observer, *Jundi* (Soldier) Ahmad Karim, and injury to the unnamed pilot.

During 1935, No. 1 Squadron was re-equipped with Hawker Nisrs, its Gipsy or Metal Moths being handed over to the Flying Training School while its Puss Moths were sent to No. 2 (Transport) Squadron, No. 1 being redesignated as an Army Cooperation squadron. Meanwhile, No. 2 Squadron now consisted of two flights of DH Dragon aircraft and one Flight of Puss Moths. The last batch of Iraqi Nisr Audaxes arrived in 1936, and between 21 and 27 February that year, No. 1 Squadron played a leading role in supporting the Iraqi Army against the 'Second Euphrates Uprising'.

This would prove to be a turbulent year for the country and its air force. On 21 February, No. 2 Squadron was sent to help suppress an uprising in the Nasiriyah area of southern Iraq, though this only took seven days before the DH Dragons were back at al-Rumaythah, south-east of Najaf. It was followed by another outburst of the 'Second Euphrates Rising', where No. 2 Squadron supported the Iraqi Army from 10-18 June 1936. During the pause between these various commitments, Akram Mushtaq, the CO of No. 1 Squadron and perhaps still also of No. 2 Squadron, had been sent to England for an army cooperation course in April 1936. His place at the head of No. 1 Squadron was taken by *Ra'is* or *Naqib* (both ranks being approximately equivalent to a British Army captain) *Tayyar* Mahmud al-Hindi, though only on a temporary basis until the end of 1936.

7
FROM EGYPTIAN ARMY AIR FORCE TO ROYAL EGYPTIAN AIR FORCE

Despite having served alongside British forces and the Hashemite Army of the Arab Revolt during the First World War, the Egyptian Army emerged from that huge conflict barely stronger than it had been in 1914. It remained British government policy to keep the Egyptian Army small (a maximum of 10,000 men), equipped with largely obsolescent weaponry, trained only in rudimentary 'colonial' warfare and wholly dependent upon Britain and its Empire for equipment. Paradoxically, there had also been no real attempt to replace the Egyptian Army's Ottoman structure and military ranks, nor to end the use of Turkish words of command and military communication. Furthermore, the senior ranks were filled by British officers, while the middle and lower officer ranks were dominated by men of largely Ottoman family origin. All officers were, of course, volunteers.

The small Egyptian officer corps would lose some educated younger men in the immediate aftermath of the Great War. Amongst them was Muhammad Sidqi (Sidki), the son of a senior Egyptian artillery officer named Muhammad Sidqi al-Mara'i. Muhammad Sidqi (senior) had served during the First World War and also became a friend of the wealthy industrialist Talaat Harb Pasha, founder of Bank Misr on 13 April 1920. The Sidqi family was part of their country's elite, one of Muhammad junior's uncles being a well-known writer and traveller, Muhammad Labib al-Batanuni, who had published a detailed account of his Hajj pilgrimage to the Muslim holy cities of Mecca and Madina in 1911.

Born on 12 May 1898 in the Zaytoun area of the Egyptian capital, Muhammad Sidqi (junior) would achieve fame as the first Egyptian to fly from Europe to his home country from December 1929 to January 1930 (see below). He became interested in aviation at the age of 12 as a result of the first air rally at Heliopolis in 1910, which took place not far from his parents' home. At the age of 18, he joined the Egyptian Army, but remained for only a few years, returning to civilian life shortly after the end of the First World War – perhaps, like many others, being disillusioned by the appalling way Egypt was treated at the post-war peace conferences.

Meanwhile, other younger men of whatever ethnic origin continued to dream of building a more modern, effective and – where possible – independent Egyptian Army. Many, especially those who had personally witnessed the use of air power during the Great War, were eager for their country to have its own air force. For a decade, such a demand was firmly resisted by the British authorities, but in the later 1920s, British attitudes began to change, albeit slowly and reluctantly. Meanwhile, until the mid-1930s, Egypt only had a small Military School rather than a Military Academy to train future army officers.

Astonishingly, the majority of the Military School's entrants are said to have lacked even secondary school certificates. Of course there were exceptions, especially after the recruitment of officer cadets began to change in the 1920s, and it was from these that Egypt's first military pilots would be drawn. The changing relationship between Egypt and Great Britain following the establishment of the supposedly independent Kingdom of Egypt in 1922 certainly had an effect upon the reputation of the Egyptian Army and of a military career. This was most apparent in the small section of Egypt's population which had a formal education.

Previously, the prestige of a career as an army officer had declined following the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, especially as the British authorities insisted that Egyptian officers be promoted for their political docility rather than their military competence. Of around 300 secondary school graduates between 1887 and 1892, 262 went on to higher studies, of whom only two joined the Military School and none joined the Police School. The British had abolished the previously existing specialised military schools, replacing them with one Military School which had fewer than 100 students around 1910. Furthermore, the military education which had previously been free now cost £16 (Egyptian) per year, which was a significant sum for ordinary Egyptian families at the time. To quote Donald M. Reid in his study of the educational and career choices of Egyptian students between 1882 and 1922:

> In short, the school had nothing to recommend it to youths of ability between 1882 and 1922. Very few army officers – the products of this school – were to hold cabinet positions between 1882 and 1952. This pattern would change dramatically in 1952, of course, when the lower middle class officers who had entered the military academy in the late 1930s came to power by a coup.

Between 1893 and 1902, none of this group of educated young Egyptian entered the army or the police. Between 1903 and 1910, there was a slight change when eight joined the police, but still none entered the army's Military School. Between 1911 and 1920, once again none entered either the army or the police. The situation only changed after 1922, along with attitudes towards a

military career, but this did not equate to a fundamental change in perceptions of the Egyptian ruling class and political system. To again quote Donald Reid:

> Teachers – along with junior army officers, journalists, minor civil servants, members of the ulema [Muslim religious scholars], and craftsmen – became a fertile recruiting ground for the Muslim Brethren, the Young Egypt Party, the Communists, and other groups dedicated to overthrowing the establishment which dominated Egyptian politics from 1922 to 1952.

Of course, not all the new officer recruits after 1922 were motivated by political factors. Many of them were – and remained – professional military men dedicated to Egypt's expanding armed services and to their careers, amongst them the future Air Commodore Muhammad Abd al-Muna'im al-Miqaati and his closest colleagues (see below).

The small Egyptian Army nevertheless provided the bulk of troops stationed within Egypt, where they were largely responsible for internal security in a country seething with discontent. The Egyptian Army also continued to play a significant role in the vast Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. In 1919, one of the men posted to the Sudan from his previous position in Cairo's main Military Hospital was *Sagh* (Major) Iskander Abdo Agami of the Egyptian Army's Royal Medical Corps. This was Agami's second tour of duty in the Sudan and he was highly experienced. His work in the Military Hospital in Khartoum nevertheless resulted in an incident which would blight his military, though not his medical, career. While Agami was carrying out one of the delicate eye operations which were his specialisation, a British medical officer came uninvited into the operating theatre. Agami did not want to be interrupted, so asked the man to leave. Thereupon, the young British officer used a phrase which included the words "damned wog", so *Sagh* Agami pulled rank and ordered him out.

However, British officers attached to the Egyptian Army enjoyed faster promotion than their Egyptian colleagues, and they included the man who had earlier insulted Agami. When this British officer was given the rank of *Qa'im-Maqam* (Colonel), he found himself in command of Iskander Agami, who was still only a major. For reasons which may have included an element of racist spite, Agami was posted to a swampy area of the Sudan, close to the Ethiopian (Abyssinian) frontier, despite already suffering from recurrent malaria. Here, *Sagh* Agami provided medical support for Egyptian military operations against dissidents of the Garjak Nuer tribe, though he was not the medical officer attached to the RAF's tiny H Unit based at Nasir on the River Sobat, this being *Bimbashi* (Lieutenant Colonel) G. Biggam (see Volume Three).

In so doing, Agami suffered more serious bouts of malaria, and sometime after the Garjak Nuer were subdued, Agami was sent back to Cairo for extended recuperation leave. Here, he was at last promoted to the rank of *Bimbashi*, and he was still in the capital when the Egyptian Army's British *Sirdar* (Commanding Officer), Sir Lee Stack, was murdered on 19 November 1924.

Iskander Agami was not alone in finding it increasingly difficult to work with British officers, especially those of junior or middle rank who had been commissioned during or immediately after the Great War. Many of these men did not come from that section of British society which had been educated since childhood in the niceties of imperial etiquette. To put it in the terminology of the time, "they did not know how to deal with native elites". In the southern Sudan, meanwhile, Egyptian military patrols ranging in size from 50-1,000 men continued the unhealthy, occasionally dangerous and generally thankless task of maintaining imperial control over local tribes which, in case of trouble, vastly outnumbered them. Even British reports acknowledged that Egyptian officers placed in command of mixed Sudanese and Egyptian troops generally performed well. On the other hand, some of these officers came to resent the degree of suffering endured by their men – and indeed themselves – without much thanks or support from the British who still occupied Egypt. It is hardly surprising that some became deeply political.

One such was Muhammad Naguib Yussuf Qutb al-Kashlan, the future President of Egypt in 1952. Generally known simply as Muhammad Naguib, he was born in Khartoum on 19 February 1901, to a family which had produced a long line of Egyptian Army officers, including his father and uncles. His mother, Zuhra Ahmad Uthman, was a Sudanese Arab. Though Muhammad Naguib's father, Yussuf Naguib, did not want his eldest son Muhammad to follow in his footsteps, Muhammad Naguib joined the Egyptian-Sudanese Army in 1918, along with a number of graduates from Khartoum's prestigious Gordon College. In so doing he apparently avoided the necessity of going to the Egyptian Military School. Sometime later, Muhammad Naguib joined a nationalist organisation called the White Flag League, whose nominal leader was another Army officer, *Mulazim Awwal* (First Lieutenant) Ali Abd al-Latif, an Egyptian-born Dinka (a tribal people from what is now the separate state of Southern Sudan). This White Flag League organised anti-British demonstrations and was consequently soon banned, with several of its leaders being imprisoned.

The theoretical independence which Britain had unilaterally declared for Egypt in 1922 (see Chapter One) had very little impact on the Egyptian Army. Defence of the country remained almost entirely in British and British Imperial hands, while Egyptian forces were only responsible for the internal security of Egypt, plus a shared role in the internal security of the Sudan. Furthermore, the Commanding Officer of the Egyptian Army remained a British officer, which was particularly galling for senior Egyptian officers, some of whom had for various reasons already earned British disapproval.

One such was General Abd al-Aziz al-Masri, though strictly speaking he remained an ex-Ottoman rather than an Egyptian officer. Having felt it necessary to leave Egypt in 1917, Aziz al-Masri spent the final year of the Great War in neutral Spain before moving to Germany in 1919. With Egypt achieving nominal independence in 1922, al-Masri returned to Cairo but was denied acceptance into the Egyptian Army – almost certainly as a result of British pressure. He nevertheless remained a respected figurehead because of his earlier military role against the Italians in pre-war Libya and against Ottoman forces in Arabia during the First World War. Aziz al-Masri's prestige was further enhanced, at least amongst junior Egyptian officers, by his continuing political opposition to the British presence in their country. His contact with the Army was nevertheless limited, and many middle-ranking Egyptian officers regarded General Aziz al-Masri's military theories as out of touch with current reality.

The Egyptian Police Force always had the character of a paramilitary militia. Under senior British officers, it was well trained, well equipped and highly motivated. Since March 1918, its elite element, the Cairo Police, had been commanded by Thomas Wentworth Russell, generally known as Russell Pasha. Some observers have described the Cairo Police as "the pride of

the regime", with a primary duty of protecting the king, the royal family and the government. Its recruits had supposedly already served at least five years in the Egyptian Army.

As already explained (see Chapter One), the Wafd Party was founded in 1919, mainly to ensure that Egyptian interests were heard during peace negotiations following the First World War. Amongst its seven most prominent founders drawn from the country's landed classes, legal profession, bankers and industrialists was Ali Shamsi Pasha. He came from a highly political, indeed nationalist family, and Ali Shamsi's father, leading Egyptian industrialist Amin Shamsi Pasha, had earlier fallen foul of the British for his vocal support of the Arabi Revolt in 1882. Though Ali Shamsi Pasha eventually quarrelled with the Wafd's most famous leader, Sa'ad Zaghlul, he nevertheless served in three Egyptian governments and became his country's first representative at the League of Nations. Three of his nephews continued the family's tradition of active political involvement, to the extent of spending time in jail for their beliefs, two of them also serving with distinction – or notoriety – in the Egyptian Air Force.

Ali Shamsi Pasha was still a leading figure in the Wafd Party when it won a sweeping success in the Egyptian elections of January 1924. Zaghlul now went to London to negotiate with the Britain's first Labour Party government, which had come to power on 22 January that year (it would fall the following November). Despite the Egyptian delegation's high hopes of a breakthrough in their meeting with what they expected to be men with a new outlook on the world, negotiation foundered over the status and future of the Sudan. After Zaghlul's failure and his return to Egypt, rioting broke out and would continue sporadically for several months. There were also disturbances in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, including outbreaks of disobedience by Egyptian troops to their British officers. In June 1924, the Egyptian Army's Railway Battalion mutinied, while there was also a small-scale insurrection in the Military School in Khartoum. However, the Sudanese troops largely remained calm and indeed helped the British restore order.

The situation seemed to have been contained, but on 19 November 1924, Sir Lee Stack, the British *Sirdar* of the Egyptian Army, was shot by a group of Egyptian students in Cairo. Hit three times, Stack died of his injuries the following day. In Britain, the Labour government headed by Ramsay MacDonald had recently fallen and been replaced by a Conservative administration under Stanley Baldwin (his second term as Prime Minister).

This new right-wing British administration wanted to appeal to its traditional voting base by demonstrating its dedication to the British Empire, and therefore demanded that all Egyptian military personnel be withdrawn from Sudan. Furthermore, the existing Sudanese troops of the Egyptian Army were to become the nucleus of a new Sudan Defence Force under more direct British control. This order was carried out with enthusiasm by Field Marshal Allenby, the British High Commissioner in Egypt, who also imposed a £500,000 fine on the Egyptian government. Egyptian Prime Minister Sa'ad Zaghlul resigned on 24 November, just four days after Sir Lee Stack died, and was replaced by Ahmad Ziwar Pasha, who, being described as "a King's man", would remain in post until 7 June 1926.

The Egyptian Army, and especially its officer corps, felt deeply humiliated by these events. The changes also damaged the careers of some officers and ended those of others. One of the men who suffered was *Bimbashi* Iskandar Abdo Agami of the Royal Medical Corps. According to Agami's son, Georges Agami (who became a noted forensic psychologist in England), in the wake of Stack's murder, senior British officers attached to the Egyptian Army insisted that any Egyptian officer who had quarrelled with a British colleague must be punished. The man who had earlier insulted Agami in an operating theatre of the Khartoum military hospital reported how he had been "expelled" from the operating theatre, and Agami was therefore told to resign his commission. This he did in 1925.

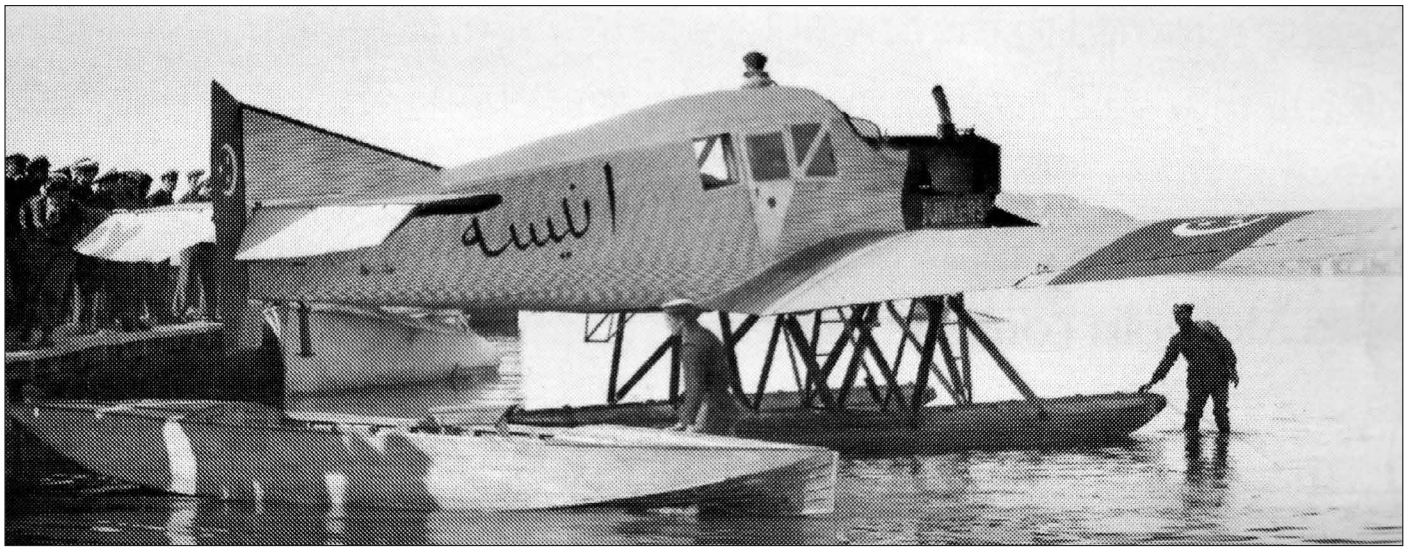
Fortunately, Iskander Agami had married only a few months earlier and, according to his son Georges, he continued a successful medical career. King Fu'ad also presented Iskander Agami with the Order of the Nile, the Egyptian equivalent of the British OBE, for loyal service as an Egyptian Army Medical Officer. Most of those Egyptian officers who were not obliged to resign kept their opinions to themselves for several years.

There would be other changes in the Egyptian Army, some apparently reflecting a British realisation that their hurried and emotional reaction to the killing of Sir Lee Stack lacked forethought. The post of *Sirdar* was replaced by that of a British Inspector General, tacitly recognising that the role of the most senior British officer should be largely advisory. Nevertheless, the size of the Egyptian Army was reduced yet further and, with the departure of the Sudanese units, became largely Egyptianized.

On the other hand, claims by some Egyptian military historians that the Army "lay mouldering" and starved of investment until 1936 are exaggerated. Early in 1925, Allenby, the British High Commissioner, allowed the creation of an Egyptian Army Council. This promptly arranged for officers to be appointed and promoted through a committee of senior Egyptian officers, not via the new British Inspector General. Partly as a result, the Inspector General found himself increasingly ignored by the Egyptian Ministry of Defence, which was still known the Ministry of War.

The removal of the post of *Sirdar* was one of Allenby's last acts as British High Commissioner in Egypt, as he was obliged to step aside in May 1925 and return home. This Allenby did reluctantly, correctly arguing that the move made it look as if he had been at fault and implied that he had mishandled the recent crisis. However, the British government intended to take a new approach in Egypt. Allenby was therefore replaced by the highly experienced Sir George Lloyd, a politician and diplomat who nevertheless continued to behave more like an imperial governor than a diplomatic representative in an independent country.

Away from the tense atmosphere of military and diplomatic matters, 1924 and 1925 saw significant steps in the development of civil aviation in Egypt. This process began with the establishment of a special committee in the Egyptian Ministry of Communication in 1924. Its members were drawn from senior civil servants in the Ministry as well as from the Egyptian Customs Authority. Their remit was to plan the future of commercial aviation in Egypt. Dry and technical as their work seemed to be, it was greeted with enthusiasm by both the Egyptian press and the population at large, especially amongst the educated elite who were eager to modernise their country. Several other Egyptians who had achieved prominence in the field of aviation were involved, along with some who would later become well-known. Most were friends or colleagues, already sharing an enthusiasm for flight or at least for modern cars, motorcycles or the Egyptian Automobile Club. They included Prince Abbas Halim, Prince Amr Ibrahim, Prince Umar Tussun (noted explorer of the Egyptian western



In 1926 the Junkers F.13 (c.n. 766) seaplane owned by Hassan Anis Pasha's Arabia Trading Company remained in Pireus harbour, Greece, for several months because the British refused permission for it to be flown to Egypt. Egyptian flags are painted on the wings and rudder while the name Anisah the female version of Anis, or Anishu the possessive form of Anis, is written on the fuselage. (Aero Club of Egypt)

deserts in the inter-war years), Kamil Eloui Bey and young Muhammad Sidqi.

This process was also being keenly watched by the British, and on 25 July 1925, the British Air Ministry was informed by its representatives in Cairo that the Egyptian government had been in secret communication with the German firm of Junkers. The correspondence concerned the establishment of a civilian air postal route between Alexandria and Trieste in Italy. What actually happened was that (as stated in Chapter Five), Hassan Anis Pasha, a wealthy Egyptian businessman, purchased a Junkers F.13 single-engined seaplane (c.n. 766), the maritime version of the world's first all-metal transport aircraft, for his Arabia Trading Company. The landing gear of the standard Junkers F.13 could easily be replaced by floats to operate from water, which made the type very popular, especially in those parts of the world where aerodromes were few and primitive.

Photographs of the Egyptian Junkers show that it was one of those which had extensions to its rudder, to compensate for the effect floats had on directional stability. The aeroplane had green and white Egyptian flags painted on the wings and rudder, just as the Egyptian Army Air Force's first DH.60 Moths would do, prior to their delivery. It also had the name *Anisah* written on the fuselage. Anis Pasha had wanted to fly his Junkers F.13 to Egypt himself, but British objections resulted in the machine languishing at Piraeus, the port of Athens, until May 1926. Anis Pasha then asked for permission to make a flight across Egypt to Yemen because Imam Yahya had invited him to bring his Junkers to Sana'a "as an Egyptian private aircraft, to organise aviation and discuss aircraft purchases" (see Chapter Five). Whether this particular Junkers F.13 ever reached Yemen remains unknown, as it had a different construction number (c.n. 766) to the F.13 which is known to have arrived in Yemen during July 1927 (c.n. 2007).

In October 1926, the Cairo newspaper *Al-Ahram* reported that a group of Egyptian businessmen, again led by Hassan Anis Pasha, had established a company with the ambition of upgrading commercial aviation in Egypt. The newspaper stated: "They are currently in the process of introducing shares and exploring the most suitable model of aircraft for their company. The company founders incline towards an all-metal, three-engine aircraft with a capacity of ten passengers and [or] two tons of freight." The machine that Anis and his colleagues had in mind was clearly the Junkers G.24, which had first flown on 24 September 1924 and had entered production the following year. Although their ambition to operate three-engine all-metal aeroplanes in Egypt came to nothing, the seeds of what would become Misr Airwork, later Misrair (now Egyptair), had been sown.

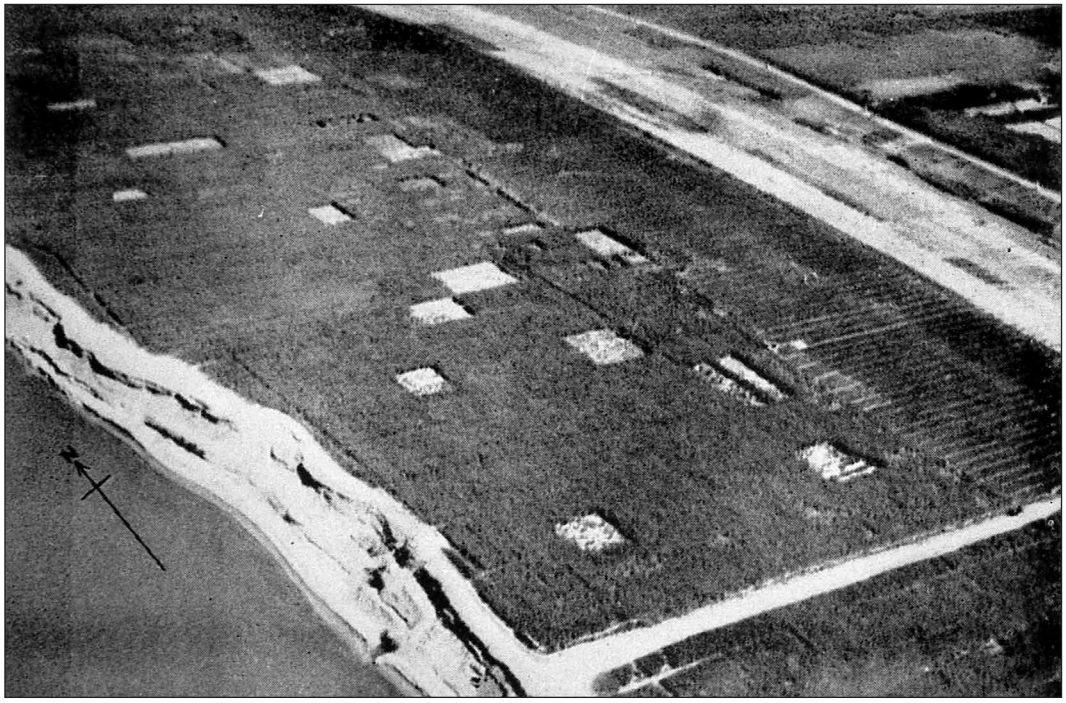
As far as the British government was concerned, the possible emergence of an Egyptian Air Force seems to have been even more problematical than the creation of an Iraqi one (see Chapter Six). As in the case of Iraq, Egypt featured prominently in an exchange of normally confidential memos concerning British 'Policy re Native Aviation' between the Air Ministry, the Foreign Office and other interested parties in London. For example, in a memo dated 24 May 1926, Sir Lancelot Oliphant, a high-ranking 'counsellor' in the Eastern Department of the British Foreign Office, expressed alarm at the proposal to train Afghan Air Force pilots in Egypt. Using the restrained and refined British official language of the time, Oliphant noted:

> Lord Lloyd [the British High Commissioner in Egypt] on being consulted as to the desirability of training Afghan pilots in Egypt stated on 3rd January, 1926, that he did not consider this desirable at the present juncture in view of the fact that the present policy of H.M. Government was to retard rather than encourage the development of Egyptian air services. In his opinion the presence of Afghan cadets in Egypt would attract immediate attention to Arabia at a moment when the Egyptian Government have lost sight of it in face of more urgent problems.

Put simply, Lancelot Oliphant believed that it was a dangerous idea which could whip up Egyptian resentment against the occupying British because their country did not have an air force, whereas backward Afghanistan had one since 1924. Furthermore, he feared Egyptian attention being drawn to the ongoing conflict between the Hashemite Kingdom of Hijaz – which still had the remnants of an air force – and the rising power of the Saudis, who were currently considering establishing one.

However, 1925 had already seen developments which would encourage the creation of an Egyptian air force. For example, the country's first effective anti-narcotics law was enacted. It had been a slow process, but in the meantime, the Egyptian Police

had been increasingly active in combating the drugs trade. Nevertheless, a reduction in supply had pushed up the prices of narcotics. Russell Pasha, Commander of the Cairo Police, estimated that half a million people, out of a current Egyptian population of around 14 million, were addicts. He stated that the primary suppliers were foreign traffickers who, though resident in Egypt, often escaped serious punishment because, as non-Egyptians, they were subject to the so-called Mixed Courts. These dated from the 19th century, when powerful foreign governments had bullied a weakened Egypt into giving many foreigners considerable legal immunity. Russell Pasha furthermore regarded the continued existence of these 'capitulations' as a disaster for Egypt.



Local farmers have hidden over a dozen patches of opium poppies in a cotton field, probably in 1934. At any distance they would be virtually invisible at ground level, but even such small patches of poppies were unmistakable from the air. Locating and photographing them was one of the EAAF's first tasks. (ex-Russel Pasha, 1946)

Cannabis resin or hashish was an age-old vice in Egypt and featured in many of the medieval *Arabian Nights*, but many people had, since 1920, become addicted to opium in the form of heroin. Opium poppies were being cultivated locally, while the refined or partially refined drug was also smuggled into Egypt in increasing quantities. Opium cultivation was made illegal in Egypt in 1926, after which only small amounts were grown, and these tended to be eaten locally rather than being refined into heroin. Unfortunately, anti-drugs campaigns by the Egyptian Police now increased the value of opium, thus encouraging the *fallahin* (rural peasantry) to risk growing more.

One of the easiest areas to do this was Upper Egypt (the Nile Valley south of Cairo as far as the Aswan Dam), where a major crop was *ful* (beans), the staple diet of the Egyptian poor. Meanwhile, cotton was the country's chief cash crop, and both these plants grew significantly taller than did opium poppies. Police patrols along roads or following donkey tracks simply could not see small patches of opium poppy growing in the middle of a large field of beans or cotton. Furthermore, the local inhabitants either supported neighbouring farmers or were unwilling to inform on those to whom they were probably related in a highly traditional society. Something new was needed, and 'eyes in the sky' seemed to offer a solution, though it would take several years to arrive.

In the meantime, various members of the Egyptian elite, some closely associated with the royal family, tried to increase air mindedness in the country while simultaneously pursuing their own passion for flying. One such was Kamil Eloui Bey, who had reportedly attended a flying school in France around 1929 and then returned to Egypt with a de Havilland DH.60 Moth the following year. However, Kamil Eloui had not received his pilot's licence, so brought his aeroplane home by ship. His DH.60 Moth

Part of Almaza aerodrome around 1930 when it was still primarily an RAF base. Almaza would later become the Egyptian Air Force's main home, and now houses the EAF's new Air Force Museum. (EAF Museum)

also remains a mystery, as nothing seems to be known about it before it became the first aeroplane on the Egyptian civil register in May 1931. As SU-AAA, it was almost immediately transferred to the Misr Flying School (Misr Flying Institute) established that month at Almaza. Reportedly purchased as a new aeroplane, its construction number and registration before 1931 are unknown. It is said to have been French, and it is possible that this was one of the first licence-built Morane-Saulnier MS.60 'Morane Moths', production of which started in 1930.

Another Egyptian pioneer pilot was Muhammad Ahmad Hasanain, who, after his famous exploratory expeditions into the Libyan or Western Desert frontier regions of Egypt and north-western Sudan between 1920 and 1924, made four unsuccessful attempts to fly from Europe to Egypt in the late 1920s. Three of the attempts were before the successful flight by Muhammad Sidqi, while the last was at almost exactly the same time. Muhammad Ahmad Hasanain was the Oxford University-educated grandson of Ahmad Hasanain, the last Egyptian Admiral of the Fleet before the Egyptian Navy was scrapped following the British occupation of the country. Admiral Ahmad Hasanain also came to be known as 'The Prince of Merchants'. His son Muhammad Hasanain rose to become a respected al-Azhar University professor and a close advisor to the Khedive Abbas Hilmy II (January 1892 to December 1914) and to his successor, Sultan Hussain Kamal al-Din (December 1914 to October 1917). Muhammad Ahmad Hasanain was born in 1889 and was appointed an assistant inspector at the Ministry of the Interior in 1920. This was before he was put in charge of the country's negotiations with Italy over the disputed Libyan frontier (see Volume Three).

In 1924, Muhammad Ahmad Hasanain became King Fu'ad's personal secretary. At that time he had the rank of Bey but would be promoted to *Pasha* somewhat later. In this position, Hasanain enjoyed the king's keen interest when it came to his flying ambitions, including financial support. A well-publicised rivalry soon developed between Muhammad Ahmad Hasanain, who used British aeroplanes, and Muhammad Sidqi, who flew a German one. Meanwhile, the British and German aviation press took an interest in the race to be the first Egyptian to fly solo between Europe and Egypt.

According to the respected Egyptian writer Mustafa Amin, Muhammad Ahmad Hasanain's first idea was to fly from Cairo to London rather than the other way around, though this might be a misunderstanding. The version of Hasanain's adventurers which is current in Egypt somewhat exaggerates their epic quality. It states that he set off from southern England but crashed in southern France, destroying his unidentified aeroplane though escaping unhurt. It was apparently after this first attempt that Ahmad Shawki, Egypt's 'Prince of Poets', wrote an unpublished and unfortunately undated poem in praise of Hasanain's aerial ambitions. According to Mustafa Amin's colourful account, Hasanain's next attempt again ended in a crash, this time in Switzerland.

Muhammad Sidqi in the cockpit of a Dietrich DP IIa Bussard which he reportedly considered purchasing in 1929 for his flight from Berlin to Cairo. (Sidqi family archive)

Meanwhile, according to Hasanain's rival Muhammad Sidqi, all the aircraft involved were de Havilland Moths. What is clear is that the next and final aeroplane was indeed a de Havilland DH.60 bearing the British civil registration G-EBTD. It had been registered on 30 July 1927 and would prove to be a very interesting aeroplane. At that time it was still owned by the de Havilland Aircraft Co Ltd, based at the Stag Lane aerodrome in north London, where it was initially intended for the de Havilland School of Flying. A certificate of airworthiness was issued just over a month later on 1 September, but after a short period at the flying school, G-EBDT became a test aeroplane for de Havilland's new

Ahmad Hasanain Bey checking the attachment of a spare propeller to side of his de Havilland DH.60 Moth. This was the same blue and silver aeroplane (registration G-EBDT) which had recently completed de Havilland's Sealed Gipsy Engine Reliability Tour of 51,000 miles. The only visible difference was the addition of the name of Princess Faiqa (more correctly Faiqah) on the sides of the engine cowling. (Albert Grandolini collection)

Gipsy I engine. This was installed in August 1927, and strenuous, indeed brutal flight trials started the following month in order to find the new engine's limits. They were notably successful, with a number of highly experienced test pilots failing to 'break' the Gipsy I engine.

G-EBDT was then given a new engine, a Cirrus II, and was fitted with new Handley Page auto-slots. In this configuration it was used for stalling trials but was damaged by a heavy landing at Stag Lane on 19 March 1928, when Captain Geoffrey de Havilland (senior) was demonstrating the new Handley Page auto-slots to members of the aviation press corps. Rebuilt within a few days, G-EBDT was given a new de Havilland Gipsy I engine taken at random from the production line for another equally strenuous testing programme. During this Sealed Gipsy Engine Reliability Tour, the aeroplane was flown by a team of pilots who covered 51,000 miles in 600 hours' flying time between 29 December 1928 and 24 September 1929.

The success of the well-publicised Engine Reliability Tour boosted sales of the de Havilland DH.60 Moth and prompted the de Havilland Company to make an open-ended promise: "The de Havilland Aircraft Company Limited pledges itself to undertake, subject to certain reasonable conditions, the cost of repairs to an aircraft delivered to its owner, new and unused, on or after December 1st 1929, which suffers a forced landing from a failure of a Gipsy engine."

Muhammad Ahmad Hasanain Bey was clearly impressed. However, he chose to acquire the several-times rebuilt and re-engined DH.60, G-EBDT, rather than purchase a new aeroplane. He either bought the machine or obtained it on loan from the de Havilland Company sometime in January 1930. Given the publicity which attended his attempted flight home, de Havilland probably hoped for further positive publicity. The DH.60 had a dark blue fuselage, with silver wings, tail and elevator. One photograph clearly shows that this was the Moth which Hasanain named *Princess Faiqa* (more correctly transliterated as Faiqah) after King Fu'ad's third daughter. Some sources have suggested that the name given to Hasanain's DH Moth was *Princess Faiza*, but this name was given to Muhammad Sidqi's Klemm when he flew from Germany to Egypt in January 1930.

A photograph of Hasanain's DH.60 Moth appeared on the front page of an Egyptian news magazine called *Al-Lataif al-Musawara* on 27 February 1930, accompanied by a caption which read: "The esteemed and bold pilot Ahmad Hasanain Bey, the chamberlain, in flying clothes aboard his aeroplane, in which he set off from London to Egypt on the 20th of the current month, may he be accompanied by God and may God direct his steps."

With the name *Princess Faiqa* painted on the engine cowling, and a spare propeller strapped to the front of the fuselage, G-EBDT flew from Heston in west London to Lympne on the south coast of England on 20 February 1930. Lympne was designated as the UK's Customs Aerodrome, which was why aircraft leaving or entering the country went though here. The following day, Hasanain took off "for Egypt and India", according to his flight plans. All went well until he reached Pisa in Italy, where, according to British records, the DH.60 was damaged while landing on 28 February. It was subsequently shipped back to the United Kingdom.

From this point onwards, British and Egyptian sources disagree. Whereas the British state that de Havilland DH.60 G-EBDT was shipped back to England for repair, Egyptian sources indicate that, having recovered, Hasanain tried again but only got as far as Naples, where another accident put the machine out of action. It is unclear whether this was the same aeroplane or an Italian machine which was reportedly loaned to the Egyptian explorer-adventurer.

DH.60 registration G-EBDT next appeared in British official records on 19 July 1930, when the South African High Commissioner in the UK entered it into the Hanworth Air Race, where it was flown by Captain R. Douglas. Was there time between late February and mid-July for Hasanain to recover, fly from Pisa to Naples, damage his aeroplane a second time and see it shipped back to England, where it was repaired before being acquired by the South African High Commissioner and entered into an air race? There was certainly a serious accident somewhere, Hasanain reportedly being so badly injured that Italian doctors feared for his life. He is said to have thought he was going to die, but, remembering Shawki's poem recently written in his honour, he repeated one of its lines over and over in his head: "Courage O Lion, Courage O Lion." Hasanain recovered, as much to his own surprise as to that of his doctors. What is clear is that the Italian authorities offered to provide Hasanain with another aeroplane, but this caught fire during a test flight, reportedly killing two Italian technicians. Muhammad Sidqi had by now reached Cairo, winning the race to be the first Egyptian to fly solo from Europe, so King Fu'ad ordered Muhammad Ahmad Hasanain to give up, while at the same time promoting him to the rank of *Pasha*.

Thereafter, DH.60 registration G-EBDT was passed to the Cinque Ports Flying Club Ltd in Lympne, was part-exchanged for another DH.60, registration G-EBSA, in January 1931, and was probably in the ownership of Brooklands Aviation Ltd when the company took over the Cinque Ports Flying Club in December 1931. After other vicissitudes, including another crash and repair, G-EBDT was pressed into military service during the Second World War in June 1940; given the RAF serial number AW153, it was flown by No. 46 Maintenance Unit (MU) at Lossiemouth in Scotland, followed by No. 32 MU at St Athan later in 1940, until it was written off at an unspecified date.

Meanwhile, Muhammad Ahmad Hasanain continued to be held in high regard by the British establishment. The British had made him a Knight Commander of the Royal Victorian Order back in 1927, thereafter referring to him as Sir Ahmad Hasanain. This had the perhaps foreseeable effect of making 'Sir' Ahmad Hasanain Bey – or Pasha as he became – look pro-British to many of his fellow Egyptians, and he was unjustly accused of lacking sympathy with Egyptian nationalist aspirations. On the other hand, a secret British Foreign Office report on Muhammad Ahmad Hasanain Pasha stated that "It would be a great mistake to act on this assumption". As later events proved, Hasanain was, and would remain, an Egyptian patriot, though not, perhaps, an Arab nationalist. It is also worth noting that his rival, Muhammad Sidqi, would be awarded the Royal Victorian Medal late in life.

Muhammad Ahmad Hasanain Pasha was a popular and somewhat romantic figure within the upper ranks of Egyptian society, especially with younger members of the royal family. For example, the 'junior princesses' and cousins Tawhida Yeghen and Emina Tussun counted him a friend. These two lively young ladies would hold traditional Egyptian all-girl parties at which a local RAF military band provided music. The latter were reportedly bemused by seeing young women dancing together, as no young men were present. In the 1920s, there were limits on 'being modern', even in the most Westernised elements of Egyptian society. Princess Tawhida's first marriage in 1919 having been unsuccessful, she separated early in 1920 and divorced her

husband a few years later. She then married Prince Muhammad Abbas Halim, the ex-member of the German Army and Ottoman Air Force who would go on to play a significant if controversial role in the development of the Egyptian Air Force.

Egypt may have had its 'flapper' generation, but the country's politics continued to be unrelenting, its relations with Britain remaining highly charged. On 23 August 1927, the veteran politician Sa'ad Zaglul died and was succeeded as leader of the Wafd Party by Mustafa Nahas. He in turn became an occasionally controversial figure but would remain a dominant personality in Egyptian politics until the Free Officers Revolution in 1952. A number of other Egyptian political parties tried to challenge the Wafd's position, but never achieved a comparable following. They included the Liberal Constitutionalist Party, the Union Party and the Sa'adist Party, which were, at various times, used by King Fu'ad and his son King Faruq as counterweights to the Wafd. Other minor political groupings were little more than the personal adherents of various political figures.

In the military sphere, General Aziz al-Masri was appointed Commander of the Egyptian Police Academy in 1927, a position he would hold until 1936. Though a strict disciplinarian, al-Masri won the affection and loyalty of many in both the Egyptian Police and the Army at this time. He is remembered as one of those older men who opened the eyes of a younger generation of cadets to the reality of their country's situation. For precisely the same reasons, al-Masri was viewed with deep mistrust by the British, especially when King Fu'ad chose him as one of young Prince Faruq's tutors.

King Fu'ad's profound interest in military matters led him to re-establish an Egyptian Naval School or College in Alexandria. Conceived in 1925, its first 18 cadets had been sent to England to be trained at the Thames Nautical Training College, otherwise known as HMS *Worcester*, at Greenhithe east of London. When they returned to Egypt, they became the nucleus of the Alexandria Naval School, which came into being in 1927. However, there was still no Egyptian Navy, so the Naval School's officer graduates went into the Egyptian Coastguard Service.

The creation of an Egyptian Air Force would similarly reflect King Fu'ad's support. Before that, 1927 saw the establishment of an Egyptian government Department of Aviation as part of the existing Department of Transport. Hassan Anis Pasha was appointed head of civil aviation and three training missions were sent to England, the last being in 1929, but as yet no further steps were taken to create an Egyptian airline or an Egyptian Air Force. This was despite the fact that several of the Egyptian 'air enthusiasts' mentioned above, including Muhammad Sidqi and Kamal Eloui Bey, had for several years been discussing the need for their country to have its own airline.

The Italian government may now have been trying to persuade the Egyptians to agree to the establishment of a joint Egyptian-Italian airline; by the summer of 1930, such a prospect was worrying British Air Vice-Marshal Sir Sefton Brancker, Director General of British Civil Aviation since 1922. He was eager for the British company Air Work to take a lead in setting up an Egyptian airline, hoping – correctly as it turned out – that Air Work's apparent independence from 'imperial' British government links would make it more acceptable to the Egyptians. By then, Brancker had been killed in the tragic crash of the British airship R101 in France on 5 October 1930.

Cairo's domestic politics came to the fore again in 1928, with the Egyptian constitution being suspended until 1929. In March 1928, the *Ikhwan al-Muslimin*, or 'Muslim Brotherhood', was founded in Egypt by Hassan al-Banna as a religious, social and political movement. Unlike so many other political movements which emerged during this period, the *Ikhwan al-Muslimin* still exists and continues to wield considerable influence, despite having been banned – neither for the first nor probably the last time – by the Egyptian government in 2013. Meanwhile, Russell Pasha, head of the Cairo Police, organised an Egyptian Central Narcotics Intelligence Bureau in 1928, making it a truly effective organisation to combat drug smuggling and the growing of opium poppies in Egypt.

The year 1929 seemed to be a rather quieter one, with the restoration of the Egyptian constitution and the return of the Wafd Party to government under Mustafa Nahas following its resounding success in a general election. Meanwhile, far away in Europe, some Egyptians had chosen Germany as the place where they wanted to learn to fly. This was almost certainly because they found themselves more welcome here than elsewhere. The first is believed to have been Abd al-Hamid Ahmad Efendi, who was taught by the Flugschule Bornemann at Staaken aerodrome outside Berlin, and probably also at Kassel or Stuttgart-Böblingen. Staaken aerodrome must have been a particularly interesting place in which to learn, as the huge hanger of the former Zeppelin factory had been turned into a film studio. Fritz Lang's remarkable film *Metropolis* was made there in 1925–26, while *The Ship of Lost Souls* starring Marlene Dietrich was partially filmed there from April-June 1929.

According to the recollections of one of Abd al-Hamid Ahmad's fellow students, an attractive young brunette from Bavaria named Christl-Marie Schultes, there were at the time 21 students at Staaken, including an Egyptian (Abd al-Hamid Ahmad), a Chinese, several Poles and Russians, and an African from Liberia. Each nationality at the aerodrome was represented by their own country's flag. Learning to fly in the Flugschule Bornemann was far from cheap: to reach the A1 grade in 1927-28 cost about 3,500 reichsmark.

Christl-Marie Schultes would become one of Germany's best-known female pilots, though at the time she had difficulty getting accepted on the flying training course. Ten students were assigned to each aeroplane, though the records show that there were only two machines, and the youngsters were taught in order of their acceptance on the course.

The aeroplanes had dual controls, and Christl-Marie's teacher, who may have been the only instructor in the school, was an ex-military pilot. Abd al-Hamid Ahmad is known to have trained on one of the Bornemann flying school's two Dietrich DP.IIa biplanes, either registration numbers D-736 (construction number 168) or D-380 (construction number unknown). A third Dietrich DP.IIa previously used by the school (D-644, c.n. 137) no longer seems to have been available. This type first flew in 1923, and Abd al-Hamid Ahmad may therefore have been the third Egyptian to qualify as a civilian pilot, following in the slipstreams of Prince Amr Ibrahim and perhaps Prince Abbas Halim. A photograph of him in one of these machines, with the number 7133 visible on the side of the fuselage, has led to some confusion because these figures were actually part of the Flugschule Bornemann's telephone number. If the writing on the Dietrich was the same as that on the school's Raab-Katzenstein RK 2 Pelikans used in 1927, it would read 'Fliegerschule Berlin-Staaken; Tel. Spandau 7133'.

The Flugschule Bornemann had been founded in 1924 by Otto Bornemann, who had earlier worked in the German car industry and had no prior experience in aviation. Bornemann nevertheless

became the chief agent for Dietriech-Gobiet aeroplanes. In 1927, he also became the agent for Raab-Katzenstein aeroplanes, but the company ceased trading later that year and nothing further is known of Otto Bornemann. The Flugschule Bornemann itself went bankrupt and its remaining students, including Abd al-Hamid Ahmad Efendi and Christl-Marie Schultes, moved to Böblingen. This lay a few kilometres south-west of Stuttgart, and here they continued their flying training with the Raab-Katzenstein flying school. While Abd al-Hamid Ahmad largely slipped out of the headlines after gaining his pilot's licence, Christl-Marie Schultes purchased a British de Havilland Moth in 1929 and tried to carve out a career in aviation. She would live through tumultuous times, trying to take part in an international long-distance flight from southern Germany via Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Persia, hoping to eventually reach Japan. A severe crash in May 1931, in which she lost her left leg, ended that dream, but two years later she founded a magazine dedicated to aviation. Christl-Marie also attracted the attention of the Nazi Party because she had a Jewish fiancé.

In 1934, Christl-Marie left Germany, settling first in Switzerland, then Spain, Portugal and finally France. Following the German occupation of France in 1940, Christl-Marie's involvement in helping various persecuted groups resulted in her being sent to the Ravensbrück concentration camp in 1941. Unexpectedly released in 1944, she continued to express anti-Nazi opinions, was rearrested and sentenced to death. Fortunately, Christl-Marie escaped execution at Stadelheim through the timely arrival of American troops on 1 May 1945. After the war, this remarkable woman continued humanitarian work until her death in 1976.

Other Egyptians who are known to have learned to fly in Germany during this period included Dr Elsai, a medical doctor who lived on the Potsdamerstrasse in Berlin while a student pilot at the Deutscher Aero Lloyd in 1925. Another was El Awan Tawfik, a qualified engineer who was a student pilot at Deutsche Verkehrsflieger Schule at Berlin-Staaken in 1925. Then there was Jerome Essayie from Port Said, who gained his 'Land-A' pilot's licence on 16 May 1929, though the school where he learned to fly remains unknown.

However, the most famous Egyptian who learned to fly in Germany between the First and Second World Wars was Muhammad Sidqi. Some weeks before Ahmad Hasanain Bey appeared on the front cover of *Al-Lataif al-Musawara* with his British-manufactured de Havilland Gipsy Moth biplane, his rival Muhammad Sidqi had taken pride of place on the magazine's cover with a German-manufactured Klemm monoplane. The photograph was accompanied by a caption which compared Sidqi with four other Egyptian sporting heroes of the time: namely two weightlifters (Sayid Effendi Nassir and Mukhtar Effendi Hussain) and two swimmers. The text also bemoaned what was regarded as the country's humiliation four years beforehand, when Hassan Anis Pasha was refused permission to fly his Junkers seaplane from Greece to Egypt, this being widely blamed upon over-mighty British imperialists. Inside the magazine were two more pages of photographs and captions dealing with Muhammad Sidqi's time in Germany.

After disturbances in Egypt against the British occupation in 1919 (see Volume Two), several wealthy families like the Sidqis sent their children abroad for further education. So, at the age of 21 and having recently retired from the Egyptian Army, Muhammad Sidqi travelled to Berlin with a friend to study business economics. Despite suffering the aftermath of the Great War and soon to be crippled by debt through having to pay massive reparations, Germany was nevertheless on the eve of the 'Roaring Twenties'. In this fevered atmosphere, and being from a generation which, in Germany, had suffered staggering casualties, young Muhammad determined to enjoy himself. A photograph from this time shows him as a handsome young man, sometimes holding a sausage kettle or a beer while sitting casually on a motorcycle in front of a bar.

Muhammad Sidqi soon obtained a motorcycle driving licence, took dancing lessons and frequently went to the *tanztee* ('tea dances') which were then so popular amongst Europe's young men and women. It was there that he met Franziska Selma Paula Bach, a great-great-great-granddaughter of the composer Johann Sebastian Bach. She not only became Muhammad Sidqi's wife in 1921 but remained his most determined supporter in achieving his flying ambitions. Indeed, the family say that "she made him what he became".

Meanwhile, the Sidqis' wealthy friend, Talaat Harb, had founded Bank Misr, the first truly Egyptian bank, back in April 1920. Muhammad Sidqi's father persuaded Talaat Harb to offer his son a job, which was accepted. However, Muhammad Sidqi (junior) soon found that he did not like sitting at a counter behind a metal grill, though he was occasionally able to escape on his motorcycle drives across the desert while continuing to dream of flying. The bank job lasted around two years until Muhammad could stand it no longer and decided he must learn to fly. This

Muhammad Sidqi having an official document stamped at one of Berlin's aerodromes. The aeroplane is a Klemm Kl 25 IIa, registration D-1583 (c.n. 127), which was not the machine in which he would soon fly to Egypt. (Sidqi family archive)

Kamil Eloui Bey (later Pasha), the first managing director of Misr Air Work, established in 1932. (Sidki family archive)

meant he had to leave Bank Misr and no longer had a regular income. Instead, he travelled to Germany in search of a suitable flying school.

Muhammad Sidqi returned from Berlin some months later, probably in December 1926, for the birth of his son Usama Sidqi, the future Egyptian bomber pilot, on 23 January 1927. Some three weeks earlier, Muhammad had seized this opportunity to take part in a race from Cairo to Ismailiya in a motorcycle with a sidecar, which he also used in the first direct motorcycle drive across the desert from Cairo to Suez. The machine was probably a Harley-Davidson, which was unusual in having a reverse gear.

Later that year, Muhammad Sidqi returned to Germany with his family, sailing from Port Said to Hamburg aboard a Nord-Deutscher Lloyd ship and setting up home in Berlin. However, during 1927–28 Muhammad Sidqi learned to fly at the Raab-Katzenstein flying school at Böblingen and also at that aircraft company's factory near Kassel-Waldau, his main flying instructor being a certain Mr Benz. Sidqi travelled between the German capital and Kassel by motorbike. In Germany he also met several famous pilots, including the First World War German fighter ace and now stunt pilot Ernst Udet, who became a friend and perhaps something of a mentor. Udet also established a company manufacturing light aircraft, the Udet Flugzeugbau GmbH in Munich. Its most successful design was the U 12 Flamingo, which first flew in April 1925 and would also be manufactured in Austria, the Baltic States and Hungary. Udet joined the Nazi Party in 1933 and was involved in the early development of the revived Luftwaffe, where he was appointed director of research and development. He committed suicide in 1941, partly as result of increasing tensions with Hitler's government.

One of Muhammad Sidqi's instructors was almost certainly Gerhard Fieseler, the highest-scoring German fighter ace on the Macedonian Front to survive the First World War (credited with 19 confirmed victories). He was managing director and chief designer of the Raab-Katzenstein company before it went bankrupt in 1930, being responsible for several aeroplanes including the Raab-Katzenstein K 1 *Schwalbe* ('Swallow') which first flew in 1926. Indeed, this type, powered by a Siemens Sh 11 engine, was probably the one on which Muhammad Sidqi first learned to fly. Subsequently, Gergard Fieseler would design the famous Second World War Fieseler Fi 156 *Storch*.

In 1929, Muhammad Sidqi was photographed, in company with other flying students, next to an Anzani powered Raab-Katzenstein RK 9 *Grasmücke* ('Hedgesparrow'). This type first flew in 1928 with a three-cylinder 26kW (35hp) Anzani radial engine, though a later version, the RK 9a, had a more powerful nine-cylinder 30kW (40hp) Salmson 9.AD. Neither of these engines was, of course, German; the first being Italian and the second French. One of the Raab-Katzenstein K 1 *Schwalbe* machines which Sidqi flew, or was at least photograph next to, had the German civil registration number D-875. This aeroplane (c.n. 10) was first owned or registered to H. Schneider of Schettau, then H. Anders of Weissenfels and the Raab-Katzenstein flying school, before being passed to K. Halbach of Witzhelden and finally to C. Hintz of Steinheim.

However, Muhammad Sidqi was also photographed in the cockpit of a Dietrich DP IIa Bussard, registration number D-1009. On 9 December 1929, *Al-Lata'if al-Musawara* incorrectly reported that Sidqi purchased this aeroplane at Tempelhof aerodrome, just outside Berlin. In reality, the picture is likely to have been taken at Teltow airfield near Berlin, to which the Dietrich Flugzeugwerke company had moved in 1927. By the time Sidqi arrived, the Dietrich company had collapsed, and perhaps the young Egyptian hoped to purchase an aeroplane at reduced price. He had placed himself in a potentially embarrassing position, at least in terms of Germany's increasingly dangerous politics.

A few years earlier, five Dietrich aeroplanes had crashed, two pilots being killed, which had undermined confidence in Dietrich designs. Furthermore, Richard Dietrich had come to believe in the Nazi ideology which was spreading across Germany. Partly as a result, Dietrich had broken with his previous business partners, the Belgian Anatole Gobiet and Kurt Katzenstein, who was of Jewish descent. The latter had served as a German fighter pilot during the First World War. Dietrich's third partner had been Antonius Raab, who came from a prominent anti-Nazi family. After the Nazis came to power, Kurt Katzenstein moved first to the Netherlands and then to South Africa, while Antonius Raab similarly moved around Europe, briefly establishing businesses in various countries until the fall of Greece to the Axis forced him to flee to Egypt. There, Raab wrote anti-Nazi articles for various newspapers and even made a film to win Egyptians over to the Allied cause. By that time, Richard Dietrich had attempted to set up his own company, which only lasted a year, and in a book which the pro-Nazi Dietrich published in 1942, his failure was blamed on "the Jews".

Without access to Muhammad Sidqi's logbook, the date of his qualification as a pilot, and the aeroplane he was flying at the time, remain unknown. However, a couple of available photographs show him next to, and in the cockpit of, a Klemm Kl 25 IIa with the registration D-1583 (c.n. 127). In both he looks extremely happy, though this was not the machine he would fly home to Egypt. It had first been registered to C. Schmidt of Berlin in March 1929, before being transferred to the Deutsche Luftfaht and eventually being destroyed in November 1933. This Klemm had '*Der Polizeipräsident Berlin*' on the side of its fuselage, while in another photograph with this machine, Sidqi is having a document stamped by a man in uniform, suggesting that this might have been when he got his 'wings'.

Muhammad Sidqi nevertheless still needed to get back to Egypt and had decided to compete with Muhammad Ahmad Hasanain to

be the first Egyptian to fly solo from Europe to Cairo. He initially approached Geoffrey de Havilland, whom he already knew, with a view to purchasing a Moth aeroplane, but none would be available for three months. Sidqi looked instead for a German machine. According to a report in *Al-Lata'if al-Musawara* late in 1929, Sidqi planned to undertake his ambitious flight in the Dietrich DP IIa Bussard, registration number D-1009, and would be taking off on 15 December, with an anticipated flying time (time actually in the air) of 16 hours. However, it was not to be. This Bussard (c.n. 195), which had received its civilian registration in March 1928, was owned first by G. Bergmann of Heidelberg, then M. Hauber of Aulendorf and finally H.J. Arps of Swinemunde.

Instead, Sidqi bought a Klemm Kl 25 IIa, a low wing monoplane (c.n. 172) with the German registration number D-1700. Hanns Klemm had trained as a civil engineer in Stuttgart before the Great War. Despite volunteering for military service in 1914, illness barred him from active service. After being released, Klemm returned to engineering, first being involved in aviation in 1917, initially working under the direction of Claude Dornier and then Ernst Heinkel. After the war, Klemm remained in aviation, his first successful designs being the Daimler L 15 and L 20. After setting up his own business at Böblingen in 1926, his Kl 25 was a development of the Daimler L 20 and was at first called the L 25.

Like Hasanain's Moth, Muhammad Sidqi's Klemm Kl 25 was not a new machine, having originally been registered to Friedrich ('Fritz') Wilhelm Siebel of Berlin in July 1929. Fritz Siebel was the business partner of Hanns Klemm, having attended the Dortmund Mechanical Engineering School, building his first aeroplane in 1912, working in the Deutsche Versuchsanstalt für Luftfahrt (DVL, or German Aviation Research Institute). He then established his own aircraft design and manufacturing company in 1919. Eight years later, Siebel joined the new Leichtflugzeugbau Klemm GmbH and in 1929 took part in the first *Challenge International de Tourisme* between 4 and 16 August in Paris, flying a Klemm L 25 Ia. In this machine he came seventh in the technical competition, and there is evidence that was the same aeroplane which was eventually sold to Sidqi. This Klemm was transferred to J. Runnebaum, also of Berlin, before being "sold abroad" in August 1932, this date being when Klemm D-1700 (initially registered in July 1929) was transferred from the German to the Egyptian register, not when it was purchased by Muhammad Sidqi. It differed from most of this type in having a substantial spinner and a circular exhaust pipe around the Salmson AD.9 radial engine's nine cylinders.

Like Muhammad Ahmad Hasanain in his two-seater DH.60 Gipsy Moth, Sidqi would fly his two-seater Klemm solo. He would also give it a name, *Al-Amirah Faizah* (Princess Faiza), in honour of the second of King Fu'ad's four young daughters. This name was painted on the front fuselage of the Klemm before Muhammad Sidqi took off from Berlin.

After the flight, Muhammad Sidqi wrote a letter to Hanns Klemm, the aeroplane's designer, back in Germany. Dated 12 March 1930, it was preserved for many years by Sidqi's grandson, Tarek Sidki, before being published in the German magazine *Aero-Kurier International* in October 1998. In this letter, Muhammad Sidqi is critical of the British de Havilland DH.60 Moths in which Hasanain had several times attempted to make a similar journey. Relations had initially deteriorated because Geoffrey de Havilland was angry about Sidqi's purchase of a German rather than a de Havilland machine and, according to Sidqi's family, had started spreading negative stories about the Klemm aeroplane. The result was a "fight in the newspapers", including a completely unfounded allegation that Muhammad Sidqi would not fly the entire distance but intended to travel to Greece by train before putting his aeroplane aboard ship for the final part of the journey to Egypt. A de Havilland representative had also apparently been highly critical of the small size of Sidqi's aeroplane.

The issue was becoming political, not least because Sidqi was supported and encouraged by Mustafa Nahas, the leader of Egypt's Wafd Party and Prime Minister from 16 March to 27 June 1928. Currently out of office but soon to return to power on 1 January 1930, Nahas would remain a close friend until the end of Sidqi's life.

Sidqi feared that he would be criticised for making derogatory remarks about the de Havilland Moth. There was undoubtedly now some tension, and in his letter to Klemm, Sidqi stated that he intended to take his logbook to the German Embassy in Cairo to prove that everything had gone well. He then gave a detailed description of the flight:

> To put it simply, de Havilland is jealous because none of the sweet guns of the British Isles managed [to] fly to Cairo with a single machine. Hasanain, my unsuccessful competitor, had started from London in one, in another from Pisa and another from Naples. All the Moths were completely smashed and finally he gave up and came home on foot.

Sidqi had to wait several months before he could get the necessary permissions to fly across various countries between Germany and Egypt. He also needed to increase his number of flying hours and obtain a qualification for 'blind flying' through clouds, other very bad visibility or at night. As it was now mid-winter, everyone expected Sidqi to wait until better weather arrived. Nevertheless, on 13 December 1929, the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs finally granted approval, and Muhammad Sidqi went to nearby Tempelhof aerodrome at eight o'clock the following morning. While he got his Klemm ready, his wife Franziska and 3-year-old son Usama arrived to bid farewell. They were joined by the Egyptian ambassador, Hassan Nash'ad Pasha, who gave Sidqi a strange passenger for his trip, a baby crocodile in a transparent vivarium "for luck and to protect him during his flight". They would both suffer from the cold, and Sidqi put the crocodile beneath his jacket when they went into hotels along the way. Others who gathered to see him off included his flying instructor and a reporter from the *Al-Ahram* newspaper.

Nevertheless, adverse winds delayed the start for another three-and-a-half hours. Low cloud cover would make the venture risky, especially when mountains were to be flown over, and Sidqi soon found himself stuck in Dresden. From here, he explored the next stage of the journey by train to get an impression of the narrow Elbe river valley through the Riesengebirge (Krkonose) Mountains and to decide whether it would be possible to follow the Elbe by flying close to the ground.

In his letter to Klemm, Sidqi described how his D-1700 machine completed the flight from Germany without damage, even though a snowstorm forced him to make an emergency landing near Plzen (Pilsen) in a mountainous part of what was then Czechoslovakia. Coming down in snow almost half-a-metre deep, the little Klemm came to an abrupt halt – but without harm to the undercarriage or propeller. The following day, a snowplough pulled by two horses cleared a 'runway' 10 metres wide and 100 metres long, enabling Sidqi – and his crocodile – to eventually

check into the Ambassador Hotel (Abassador Zlata Husa Hotel) in Prague.

A few days later, Sidqi reached northern Italy, where he faced fog which covered Venice and Ferrara. He thus decided to land near the River Piave, not far from Motta di Livenza in the province of Treviso. Following a telephone call to Venice, he was asked to light a fire in order to guide two lost Junkers aeroplanes of the Transadriatic Airline. An hour-and-a-half later, one of them landed safely nearby, closely followed by the second. All three were tethered for the night, and the following day, Sidqi took off for a short 25-minute flight to Venice.

Sidqi met very low cloud over the Adriatic Sea as he flew south towards Brindisi, and consequently had to fly only 5 metres above the waves, fearing that he might hit a tall structure such as a lighthouse. As conditions grew worse, he decided to land on a sandy beach which was only 20 metres wide. The Klemm again had to remain in the open throughout the night, until a light westerly breeze dispersed the clouds the following morning. Nevertheless, Muhammad Sidqi had to take off from a narrow beach in what was now a crosswind. Then came rain, and he found that Brindisi's aerodrome at San Vito dei Normanni was virtually flooded, but he had to land anyway. The aerodrome was still extremely wet when he took off in a cloud of spray the following morning, heading for Catania in Sicily. "Even I prayed", he wrote to Klemm, as he feared his Kl 25 IIa's engine might stop while he was flying over the sea or the mountainous terrain of Italy's deep south. Sidqi next had to cross a considerable stretch of open water, because the narrow Straits of Messina were at that time a closed military zone. Nevertheless, he reached Catania safely.

Some newspapers reported the rumour that Sidqi intended to take his Klemm by sea from Athens to Egypt, as a de Havilland representative in Cairo had publicly advised him to do. However, Sidqi intended to fly from Sicily to Malta; a distance of about 160km over open sea. To quote from his letter to Klemm:

> The next day I took off from Catania again in the wet at 9.30 in the morning with a brisk west-south-west wind not helping me on my way towards Tripoli [beyond Malta, on the Libyan coast]. Speaking of which, you have to be patient with the organization of the Italian meteorological station. The clouds were low (300 m), the wind remained very stubborn and it was also raining. [Next came] 600km over the open sea to Tripoli.

Sidqi had to avoid two further Italian military zones and could hardly see the massive bulk of Mount Etna because of rain. Furthermore, his little aeroplane was now buffeted by the strong Bora wind from the north-east:

> For God's sake, the Bora! The terror of the Mediterranean, but I did not have time to be scared. My left [hand] was constantly on the throttle so that the engine did not tremble at every sudden drop and threat … The compass danced between north and south and west in front of my nose! … Where was the west? … No land appeared, and the Bora seemed to have become worse.

Sidqi had been in the air for more than four hours when he eventually spotted some ships and a coast, which he hoped was Malta. This island had an aerodrome, but Sidqi only had a quarter-of-an-hour's worth of fuel left. The Bora wind of 12 January 1930 was particularly strong, blowing at up to 84kmph at ground level, and Sidqi began to think that de Havilland's advice to take ship from Greece to Egypt might have been wise. He described his Klemm as swimming rather than flying in the heavy rain, and although he reached Malta safely, he was obliged to remain there for seven days until the Bora blew itself out:

Muhammad Ahmad Hasanain in his de Havilland DH.60 Moth (registration G-EBDT). The photograph was probably taken at Heston Park in England, before Hasanain attempted flight from England to Egypt in January 1930. (Egyptian Aero Club archive)

> On the eighth day in Malta my patience could endure no more waiting. This was the 20th January 1930. I filled the tank for [a flight of] ten hours and at 10.30 a.m. buzzed my 40hp with all its strength towards Tripoli. Two hours went by. The engine was running very well. Four hours, and still no land.

The sky then began to darken as the sun disappeared. The cloud was down to 500 metres, but at least there was no rain. After six hours, Sidqi could still see no land, though he had expected to reach the coast of Africa in five hours. His 40hp engine was running at 2,000rpm, so he throttled back. Another half-an-hour passed before Sidqi saw something on the horizon: but was it land or rain? At the end of seven hours' flying, he could finally confirm that it was land, but it was now getting dark.

"I saw a village with palm trees. Was it a mirage?" he wondered. For the first time in seven hours, Sidqi increased power and flew a few circuits, looking for a suitable place to come down. The land appeared marshy and unsuitable, so he continued to fly around at very low altitude. Dusk was now almost upon him and he had no idea where he was. Consequently, Sidqi selected what looked like the best spot and landed safely at around 1745 hours. Some camel riders hurried towards him and said something in Arabic, but it was in a dialect the Egyptian Sidqi could not fully understand.

In his letter to Klemm, Sidqi failed to mention that the Italians were still facing bitter resistance in the east of Libya, while elsewhere the atmosphere remained tense (see Volume Three).

Muhamad Sidqi welcomed by officials immediately after landing in Egypt, and before he had a chance to wash the oil off his face. (from *Al-Lataif al-Musawara,* 3 February 1930)

He dismounted from his machine to stretch his legs, to allow the engine to cool and to get out his suitcase and papers – presumably also checking that the baby crocodile was alright. Meanwhile, several soldiers, officers and other civilians arrived. He was near Zuwarah. Leaving the aeroplane tethered and guarded, Sidqi was taken to Tripoli, where the Italian commander of the aerodrome told him that they had thought he must have come down in the sea. The British Consul had similarly been worried, and by the time a message reached Malta that Muhammad Sidqi had arrived safely, the British Royal Navy had already sent out two torpedo boats to look for him.

The next stage of the flight was a short hop from Zuwarah to Tripoli, but on the way Sidqi had to make an emergency landing because of carburettor trouble, landing in a partially dry, partially wet area of salt flats. After Tripoli, he headed for Sirt, but on the way he was warned that the airfield was flooded and that he could not land. A red warning flare was indeed fired from the aerodrome, but, short of fuel, Muhammad Sidqi had no choice but to land, which he did safely but in a cloud of spray. This seemed to be becoming something of a habit. "Are you real?" asked one of the aerodrome staff. Sidqi replied: "Yes, yes. If you like, please bite something so that I can prove it to you."

Next came a six-hour flight to Tobruk through almost continuous rain, illegally photographing the Italian aerodrome outside Benghazi on his way. The following leg of the journey took Sidqi across the frontier into Egyptian territory at Sollum. Between Sollum and Alexandria he had to make another emergency landing on stony ground, but eventually landed at the RAF depot at Abu Qir, just east of Alexandria, at 1700 hours on 25 January 1930. There, he was greeted by Husayn Sabri Pasha, the Governor of Alexandria, several other Egyptian dignitaries and the commander of the local police station. Captain Goldsmith, the Abu Qir depot commander, was also present, and after seeing Sidqi's Klemm Kl 25 IIa, he later wrote in the station's logbook: "It's the smallest aeroplane I've seen in my life." Despite Egypt being nominally independent, its rudimentary air traffic control system was still under British control.

A. Muhamad Sidqi's Klemm Kl 25 IIa with German registration number D-1700, at Heliopolis aerodrome at the end of his flight from Germany. The name *Al-Amirah Faizah*, written in Arabic, is just visible behind the engine. (from *Al-Lataif al-Musawara,* 3 February 1930);
B. The name *Amira Faisa* in Latin lettering may have been added later, when a stripe was also painted along the Klemm's fuselage. (Sidki family archive)

A photographer from Egypt's leading illustrated news magazine, *Al-Lata'if al-Musawarah*, took photographs, and a picture of Muhammad Sidqi's smiling but oil-begrimed faced would be published, along with several others, a few days later. Sidqi concluded his letter to the Klemm's designer and manufacturer: "This is my flight from Berlin to Cairo with D-1700, Mr Klemm. Without a single broken part in spite of the many emergency landings, and without needed to use any spares, not even the tail skid which I bought from you [before leaving Germany]." Sidqi's reception by huge crowds (reportedly 10,000 people) at Heliopolis aerodrome was as excited and tumultuous as might be expected. He was greeted there by an official delegation which included King Fu'ad's Chief Aide-de-Camp, Sadiq Yahya Pasha, Prince Abbas Halim – whose own passion for flying was well known – newly elected Prime Minister Mustafa Nahas, Mahmud Nuqrashi (the Minister for Transport) and Baron Eberhard von Stohrer, the German ambassador.

Ahmad Shawki. 'The Prince of Poets', was part of this official party, and wrote another praise poem which was published in the newspaper *Al-Ahram* on 31 January 1930:

I saw him and imagined a young Egyptian commander,
Returning from the battlefield, crowned with wreaths of victory and pride.
I have seen in his, the face of an honest Pharaoh.
His face is square and brown in color, he is completely Pharaonic,
And that is the secret of his boldness and bravery and courage.

Muhammad Sidqi was probably most pleased to be able to sleep in a comfortable bed for the first time in many days. According to *Al-Lata'if al-Musawarah* – which included a photograph of the bed in question – it had been made up by the hero's sister, "Her Excellency Aleya, wife of Dr Tawfiq Beg Ahmad at her home in Heliopolis".

King Fu'ad awarded Muhammad Sidqi the Golden Order of Merit at the Abdin Palace, while the government rewarded him with £1,000 for his "patriotic service". However, Talaat Harb said of Sidqi after his successful flight to Egypt that "His wealth lay in his intelligence and strength of character."

Amongst the many people who managed to get themselves noticed during these events was Howard Carter, the discoverer of Tutankhamun's tomb, who came up to Sidqi after waiting for two hours on the steps of the Cairo Continental Hotel to congratulate the young Egyptian pilot. According to a journalist and a photographer from *Al-Lata'if al-Musawarah* who were waiting on the balcony of the more famous Shepherd's Hotel, an American lady who was standing there asked why so many people had gathered and were waving small Egyptian flags. When told what was happening, and lacking a suitable flag, she took out her handkerchief and waved it, stating: "I saw the arrival of the American pilot hero Lindbergh, and he was also a young man. How happy I am to see the reception of the Egyptian pilot who is also young. Such healthy young people have only been created to bring adventure and pride to their country." True or not, it is a nice story.

Four days after Muhammad Sidqi landed at Heliopolis, the Egyptian Aero Club (founded in 1910) held an evening reception at the palace of Prince Amr Ibrahim at Zamalik on the island of Gezira in Cairo, to celebrate the first Egyptian pilot to fly from Europe to Egypt. The prince had clearly retained his interest in Egyptian aviation after gaining his civil pilot's brevet in France in 1921 (see Chapter One). The little Klemm monoplane was meanwhile displayed in Heliopolis Square, with advertisements

for Shell aviation fuel, proudly proclaiming that the young Egyptian pilot had used the same source of power as Bleriot when crossing the English Channel in 1909, Alcock and Brown during their crossing of the Atlantic in 1919, Hinkler in his flight to Australia in 1927 and Hermann Köhl and his crew during the first east-to-west Atlantic crossing in 1928.

At Prince Amr Ibrahim's palace, the wealthy businessman and proponent of aviation, Hassan Anis Pasha, gave a speech to celebrate the flight and announced that not only had Muhammad Sidqi joined the Egyptian Aero Club, but that he would receive a further financial reward. Apparently, Hassan Anis was particularly interested in Sidqi's crossing of the Mediterranean during very bad weather. Later that year, the Aero Club became the Royal Aero Club of Egypt, with Prince Abbas Halim as its president; one of his first duties being to lay the foundation stone of a new flying school outside Alexandria which would open in July 1933. It was followed by another flying school at Port Sa'id in 1934.

After the public celebrations were over and Sidqi had rested, he flew his Klemm to Upper Egypt for what was described as "a tribal breakfast", visiting Luxor and Aswan before returning via al-Minya and Assyut on 27 March. This flight was apparently to raise money for Egypt's poor and for a new hospital, but as the latter had links with a rival political organisation, Prime Minister Nahas and his Wafd Party were not too happy.

Meanwhile, Mahmud Nuqrashi, the Minister for Transport, had decided to develop Almaza as a civilian aerodrome because the existing aerodrome of Heliopolis was primarily a British military location. The Egyptian government had already purchased this land for a new airfield from the Ain Shams Oasis Company. The new aerodrome was initially called Misr al-Jadidah (literally New Cairo, though this was also the Arabic name for the suburb of Heliopolis) to distinguish it from RAF Heliopolis, which was a few kilometres to the south-west and closer to the centre of Cairo. The aerodrome later became better known simply as Almaza aerodrome; it still exists, also being the site of a recently established Egyptian Air Force Museum.

Precisely three months after returning from his flight to Upper Egypt, Sidqi flew back to Germany, and this time it only took 46 flying hours. As was usual throughout his flying career, Sidqi was trying to break records both for himself and his country. However, he reportedly stated that there were not enough opportunities for a civilian pilot in Egypt, upsetting the new Egyptian government under Isma'il Sidqi Pasha, though there is no real evidence that a shortage of funds prompted Sidqi's return to Europe.

Sidqi's main reason for doing so was to take part in the next *Challenge International de Tourisme* organised by the FAI (Fédération Aéronautique Internationale). This time it was based in Berlin, where it was called the *International Rundflug Europa*. Lasting from 18 July to 8 August 1930, it involved flying across Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Switzerland, Spain, France and the UK. The long-distance international flight part of the rally took off from Tempelhof on 20 July and was supposed to return on the 31st, but bad weather at Pau in southern France meant that it was extended until 1 August for some crews. Sidqi may not have taken part in the official long-distance flight, having reportedly taken off from Tempelhof on 23 July and returned between 27 and 31 July.

Crews from six different countries took part in many different kinds of aeroplanes, including four Klemm L 25s three Klemm L 25Es, two Klemm L 26s and one Klemm VL 25. The participants included either 28 or 30 Germans, the records probably differing because two non-Germans were flying German-registered machines. One was Muhammad Sidqi and his Klemm, which would retain its German civil registration D-1700 until August 1932. About a month-and-a-half later, Sidqi flew to take part in another air rally in Italy, and within a year he had carried over 100 passengers, mostly on sightseeing flights from Tempelhof aerodrome outside Berlin, though he also flew to Königsberg in East Prussia (now the Russian city of Kaliningrad).

The Misr Flying School (later called the Misr Flying Institute) was set up in May 1932 at Almaza to train Egyptian and foreign candidates. As such it was the first indigenous flying school in the Middle East and Africa. Kamil Eloui Bey gave the flying school his own DH.60 Moth, with its newly acquired Egyptian civil registration of SU-AAA, while Muhammad Sidqi returned to Cairo to work for the school. Kamil Eloui would not obtain his pilot's licence for several more years, but in the meantime, he occasionally flew with Sidqi.

On 7 June 1932, Misr Airwork (the ancestor of the later Misrair and today's Egyptair) was formally established by Egyptian Royal Decree, with financial support from Talaat Harb. Its board of directors included British as well as Egyptians. Two of the latter were from Bank Misr, which had put up 85 percent of the money to create Misr Airwork. They were Talaat Harb himself and Midhat Yakan Pasha, who became the company's first chairman. Kamil Eloui Bey was not from the bank, but as the man currently in charge of Almaza aerodrome, he was appointed as Misr Airwork's managing director to supervise the running of the business. Muhammad Sidqi became Misr Airwork's first chief pilot. However, the new company did not start operations until July 1933. That year, two of Misr Airwork's British pilots flew from Egypt to Saudi Arabia, almost certainly landing at Jiddah because it was impossible for non-Muslims to go to Mecca or Madina. This is understood to have been the first step in developing a commercial air route for Hajji pilgrims which eventually came to fruition about three years later. The first scheduled flight was by Misr Airwork's DH.89A (SU-ABS), named 'Helwan', which carried five passengers plus mail from Egypt to Madina, thus reportedly becoming the first truly civil aircraft to land at the holy city.

After the Misr Flying School opened, everyone wanted to fly with Sidqi, who was by then one of the most famous men in Egypt. Talaat Harb's first flight was with him, though the banker admitted to being terrified. According to the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Ahram* of 12 January 1931, the wealthy Egyptian banker next seems to have flown with Alan Muntz in the latter's three-seater Puss Moth at Almaza as part of celebrations marking the decision to form the Misr Airworks company.

The first aeroplanes owned and operated by the Misr Flying School were de Havillands. SU-AAA was a DH.60 Moth, while SU-AAB the de Havilland DH.80 Puss Moth (G-AAVB) which Alan Muntz of Misr Airwork had flown from England to Egypt with Dame Ethel Locke-King as passenger. In Cairo, Muntz had met Talaat Harb and other leading figures in Egyptian aviation as part of the process of establishing Misr Airwork along the lines of the British Airwork at Heston in west London. This machine became part of Misr Airwork in 1931, acquiring its new civilian registration in May 1931 before being returned to the British register in July 1933, being impressed by the RAF in in May 1941 and written off in a crash just under four months later. SU-AAC was another DH.80A Puss Moth registered in June 1932. Not until August 1932 was Muhammad Sidqi's Klemm Kl 25

IIa re-registrated as SU-AAD. SU-AAE is a mystery, while SU-AAF was another DH.60 Moth, though it remains unclear who owned it. After the Klemm Kl 25 IIa was given to Misr Airwork, Sidqi became the company's senior pilot with the rank of captain, thereafter training pilots at Imbaba aerodrome on the north-western edge of Cairo in the Klemm and other machines.

Later, the now-retired Klemm stood in the garden of the Sidqi family home on Abu Simbel Road in Midan al-Gama'a in Cairo. Muhammad Sidqi's young son, Usama, remembered that when one newspaper reporter arrived to interview his father, little Usama told him that his daddy was listening to classical music and that the reporter would have to wait. Consequently, the latter 'interviewed' Usama instead. Like his father, Usama always wanted to fly, and one of his earliest memories was of how Muhammad Sidqi was treated as a hero in Egypt.

While working for the Misr Flying Institute and as an advisor for Misr Airwork, Muhammad Sidqi worried the British by advocating the purchase of German aeroplanes. In the event, only British machines were bought and used. The first non-British aeroplane on the Egyptian register was Sidqi's own Klemm, followed by an American Waco (SU-AAL) about which nothing else is known, a Waco UIC (SU-AAN) belonging to Prince Abbas Halim, a Waco ZGC-7 (SU-AAV) which was probably registered in 1936, a Zlin XII-II (SU-AAZ) probably registered in 1938 or 1939, and a handful of others during the immediate pre-war years, none of which were of German manufacture. Instead, the Egyptian flying school continued to 'buy British': SU-ABC, a DH.690G III Moth Major (registered in April 1932, which would crash at Almaza on 30 October 1941); SU-ABD, a DH.60G Gipsy Moth (ex G-ABAD, registered in May 1932); SU-ABE, a DH.80A Puss Moth (ex G-AAXU, registered in March 1932); SU-ABF, a DH.60G Gipsy Moth (registered in October 1932); SU-ABL, a Spartan Cruiser II (ex G-ACDW, registered in April 1934); and SU-ABM, the DH.85 Leopard Moth which Ahmad Salim would fly in the Circuit of the Oases Rally in February 1937 (later sold to Iraq in 1945).

Misr Airlines' operations started in July 1933, the airline's first aeroplanes being three de Havilland DH.84 Dragons (SU-ABH, SU-ABI – which crashed at al-Arish on 15 March 1935 – and SU-ABJ). Meanwhile, Muhammad Sidqi soon qualified to fly the twin-engine DH Dragon.

The flights by Muhammad Sidqi and Muhammad Ahmad Hasanain may have been amongst the most dramatic events of 1930 in Egypt, but they were not the only ones. The country's existing constitution was modified to increase royal power, despite opposition from Mustafa Nahas Pasha and the Wafd Party. Mustafa Nahas had briefly been Prime Minister from 1 January to 20 June 1930, then led the opposition to his successor, Isma'il Sidqi Pasha, who, despite having been an early member of the Wafd Party, now headed the People's Party and tried to reduce Wafd influence.

Although Prince Abbas Halim was active in politics, he was even more so on a social level, founding boxing and sports clubs, heading an Egyptian Automobile Club and subsequently the Royal Egyptian Aero Club, as well as being director of Egypt's biggest shipping company, the Khedival Mail Line. During this period, Prince Halim joined the Wafd Party and opposed both his cousin King Fu'ad and Prime Minister Isma'il Sidqi's pro-royalist constitutional changes in 1930. In December that year, Prince Halim was made President of the Egyptian National Federation of Trade Unions, where he fought to improve working and living conditions for the Egyptian urban working class.

After Abbas Halim published a pamphlet stating that the dismissal of democratically elected leaders (such as Mustafa Nahas Pasha) could cause civil war in Egypt, King Fu'ad removed Prince Halim's name and that of his children from the official list of members of the Egyptian royal family. His association with the Wafd Party would also become strained in 1931 when he proposed the formation of an Egyptian Labour Party along socialist lines, comparable to the British Labour Party. Abbas Halim would, nevertheless, later be reconciled with Wafd leader Mustafa Nahas.

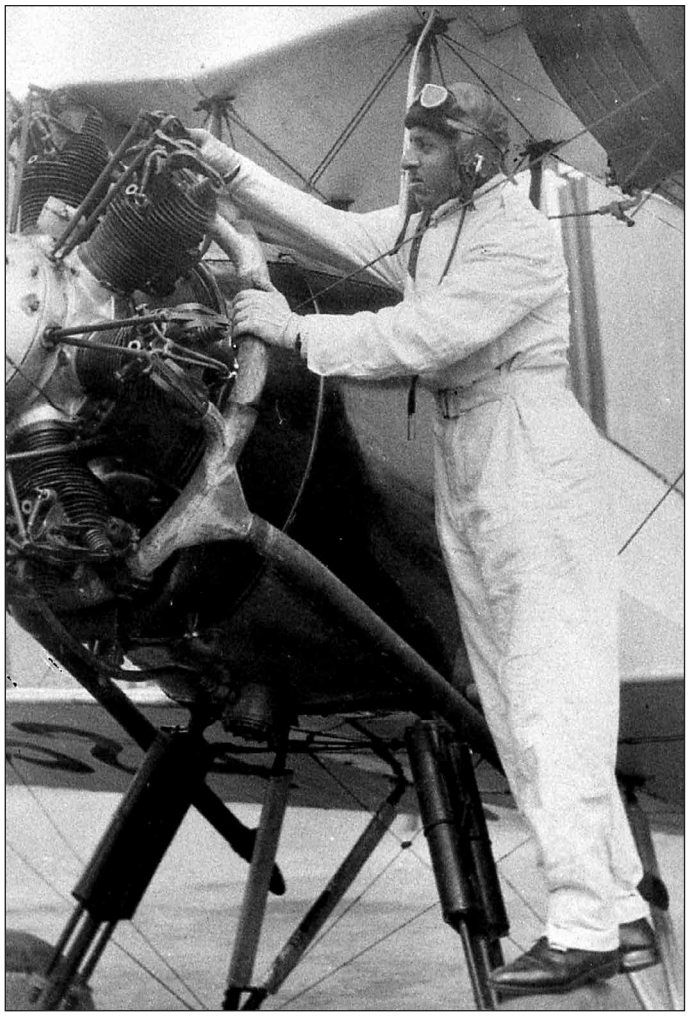
In apparent contrast with such progressive activities, Abbas Halim went on what were then fashionable hunting safaris in Africa, where he met senior members of the British royal family. Meanwhile, he maintained his close interest in aviation and would take another young Egyptian pilot under his wing. His name was Ahmad Isma'il, and, like several other aspiring Egyptian pilots, he had learned to fly in Germany, though not without incident. German records show that on 8 October 1932, Ahmad Isma'il had a minor accident while flying a Klemm L 26 Va (number D-2031, registered in April 1931) of the Deutscher Luftfahrt-Verband (German Aviation-Association). This Klemm was repaired and continued to fly until October 1936, while, after returning to Egypt, Ahmad Isma'il played a significant role in the early years of Egypt's airline, Misrair.

While all this was going on in Cairo, there was drama off the Mediterranean coast near Alexandria, where, on 11 August 1930, an overcrowded ship sank. First Lieutenant Abd al-Hamid Abu Zaid, father of Muhammad Abu Zaid – the Royal Egyptian Air Force's most famous fighter pilot during the Palestine War of 1948 – was currently serving in the Egyptian Coastguard. By his rapid and courageous action, Abd al-Hamid Abu Zaid saved 35 people from drowning and earned a medal from King Fu'ad.

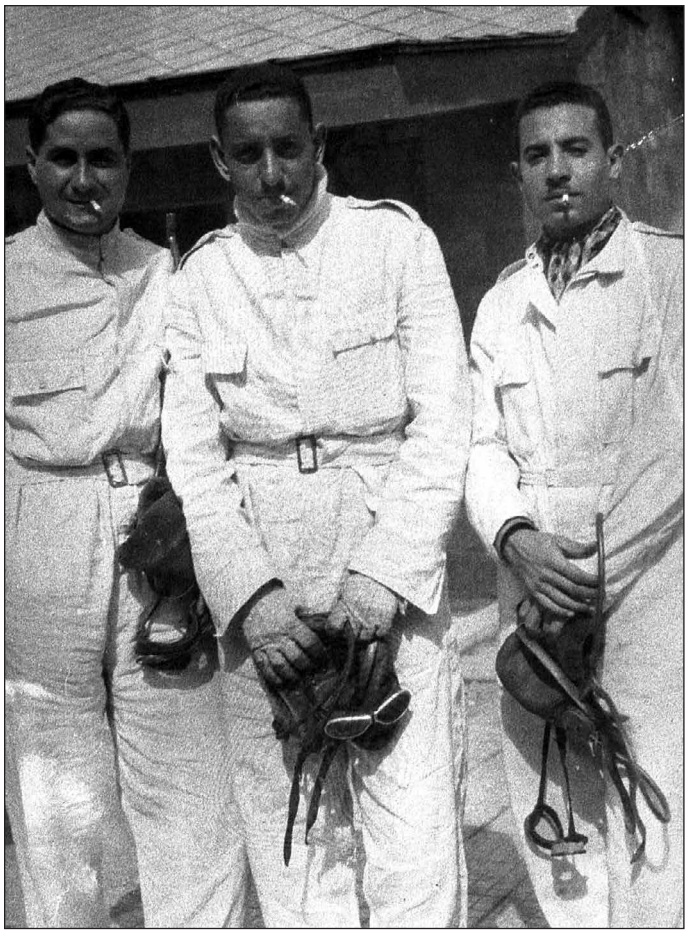
This stern and deeply patriotic man provided an impressive example for his three sons, though two would follow his example in the soon-to-be-created Egyptian Air Force rather than the Coastguard or recreated Navy. Abd al-Hamid Abu Zayd had already played a leading role in the expansion of the Boy Scout Movement in Egypt from 1919 onwards, serving as Egypt's Chief Scout in the 1920s. Meanwhile, he salvaged wrecks, fought against smuggling along Egypt's coasts and rose to become commander of the Coastguard at Suez and then at Port Said, before returning to the Egyptian merchant marine.

Presumably, Abd al-Hamid Abu Zayd (senior) heard of, or may have been indirectly involved in, the assistance which the Egyptian Coastguard station at Dumyat (Damietta) had given to Flight Lieutenant Eliot Millar King and his passenger, Second Lieutenant Lummins, on 23 April 1919. The tense situation in Egypt had recently calmed down, and these two servicemen, late of the RNAS and now of the RAF, had returned to normal duties, flying the bi-weekly mail run from Port Said to Alexandria and returning the following day. On this occasion, Eliot King was flying his favourite Short 184 named 'Kia-Ora' (number N2648) but, as he reported in his logbook, "Stopped at Damietta Light House & then had engine trouble 25 miles further on. Came down and fixed engine but waves damaged elevator so stayed night at Coastguard & and were towed home [to Port Said] next day by a tug."

Behind the scenes, preliminary work for the creation of an Egyptian air force had been going on since 1922. Whether it is correct to credit this almost entirely to King Fu'ad's efforts, as some palace circles claimed, is open to doubt, but the Egyptian monarch certainly gave the work his enthusiastic blessing.



Mulazim Awal (First Lt.) Muhammad Abd al-Muna'im al-Miqaati, one of Egypt's first four military pilots, under training at the RAF's No. 4 FTS Abu Suwayr in 1929. He is working on the engine of one of the Avro 504N primary training aeroplanes. (Mikaati family archive)



Muhammad Abd al-Muna'im al-Miqaati, Ahmad Ibrahim Abd al-Raziq and Fu'ad Abd al-Hamid Haggag, Egypt's first three military pilots at No. 4 FTS, Abu Suwayr, perhaps on 3 March 1930 when the RAF held its annual Egyptian display at Abu Suwayr. Another student, Ahmad Nagi, was younger and did not receive his wings at Abu Suwayr until early 1932. (Mikaati family archive)

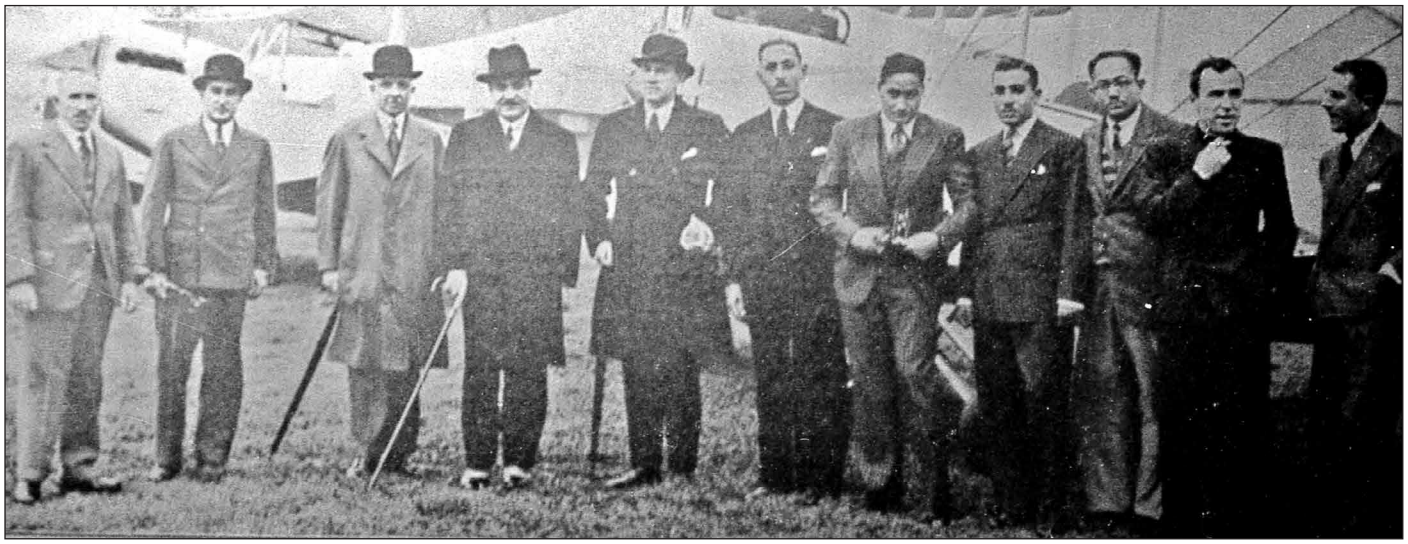
Things really started to develop after Egypt become a nominally independent country on 28 February 1922. This had been followed by Abd al-Khaliq Tharwat's government (in office from 1 March to 30 November 1922) starting to look seriously at the idea of establishing an Egyptian air force.

Several years would pass before the somewhat moribund Egyptian Aero Club was revived, but on 2 December 1922, a secret message from Air Vice-Marshal Sir Edward Ellington, the Air Officer Commanding RAF Middle East, informed the Air Ministry in London that the Egyptian government was contemplating the formation of a small air force. It would be based at Sollum on the Libyan frontier and Rafah on the Palestinian frontier in order to help Egyptian Frontier Forces prevent gun-running and other smuggling. Ellington thought that the Egyptians would probably be interested in four-seater aeroplanes, which in 1922 meant larger twin-engined types. This document is preserved in the British National Archives in London, while another document with the same date preserved in the EAF Headquarters Archives in Cairo is more specific, suggesting that the Egyptians would probably be looking for two flights of four two-seater aeroplanes.

Air Vice-Marshal Ellington was a little premature, but he nevertheless asked whether the British government would support such an idea and, if so, whether the RAF could help the Egyptians. Otherwise, he feared, the Egyptians might turn to foreign sources of supply and training. On the question of what types of aeroplane the British authorities would prefer the Egyptians to have, he asked whether they should be powerful enough to help defend Egypt against foreign aggression or weak enough not to pose a threat to the RAF in case Britain faced future problems with Egypt. In his own words: "I do not think that the Egyptian Air Force would be of any fighting value for many years, if ever, I am of the opinion that they should be advised to employ one of the cheapest types which will do the work required." It was a question which would hang over the supply of military aeroplanes to the Arab countries for decades to come – and to some extent still does.

Not much more happened during 1923, though a follow-up note from the British Foreign Office to the Air Officer Commanding RAF Middle East on 19 January expressed the British government's general support for the idea of an Egyptian air force. Meanwhile, the Egyptian government reportedly set aside a substantial amount of money for this idea, half of which was made available immediately. The project slowed down in 1924 because of the tense situation between the United Kingdom and Egypt, and, according to a report sent to the Air Ministry in London the following year, the Air Officer Commanding RAF Middle East "semi-officially advised that owing to the present situation in Egypt the matter should be delayed".

Although the British government made it clear that they did not want the proposed Egyptian air force to have significant military capability, the Egyptian government recruited Squadron Leader W.D. Long as its Air Consultant and asked him to draw up a plan. The British insisted that it must be a small force, solely for anti-smuggling and contraband purposes, with no real military



During a reception at de Havilland's aerodrome at Stag Lane in north London, the Egyptian Army's first pilots were introduced to their DH.60M Moths. The men in this photograph are, from left to right, Mr. C.C. Walker, Flt. Lt. S.J. Stocks, Maj. Gen. C.W. Spinks, the Egyptian Minister or Ambassador in London, Air Comm. A.G. Board, Mulazim Awal (First Lts.) Muhammad Abd al-Muna'im al-Miqaati, Mulazim Thani (Second Lt.) Ahmad Ibrahim Abd al-Raziq, Mulazim Awal Fu'ad Abd al-Hamid Haggag, Mulazim Awal Ahmad Nagi, Mr. Jim Mollison and Mr. F.N. St. Barbe. (Mikaati family archive)

power. The aeroplanes were also to be of a simple type, easy to fly and suitable for desert reconnaissance work.

During July 1925, Squadron Leader Long worked on a preliminary plan for such a force consisting of two flights, each of four machines, which would be stationed at Marsa Matruh on the Mediterranean coast, some distance from the Libyan border. There was already a rudimentary airstrip on or close to the beach at Marsa Matruh, which was used as a stopping and refuelling post by aeroplanes passing between Egypt and Libya. Several months later, a Bristol Type 84 Bloodhound with civil registration G-EBGG stopped there. It was flown by Lieutenant Colonel Minchin, an ex-RAF pilot currently working for Imperial Airways, who was accompanied by Mr F. Mayer of the Bristol Aeroplane Co. Ltd. This stopover was during a two-day high speed flight from Croydon aerodrome outside London to the Egyptian capital of Cairo, the Bristol Type 84 having been given a Jupiter VI engine in order to test its reliability on behalf of Imperial Airways. Men and officers of the local Egyptian Army or Frontier Forces garrison helped Minchin and Mayer refuel the Bloodhound, and eventually they arrived in Cairo just two-and-a-half hours behind schedule.

The proposed Egyptian flying corps would also have a combined repair and stores section somewhere near Alexandria, preferably at an aerodrome which could also be used by civilian aircraft. Meanwhile, the Egyptian government wanted the British to immediately allow four Egyptian Army officers to be sent for flying training at the RAF College, Cranwell. These men would be selected from nine officers who were to be chosen for the air arm, while the five others would be trained in technical and stores duties. One hundred and fifty Egyptian mechanics would similarly be placed on two-year training courses with the RAF in Egypt.

In the third year, after training of these Egyptians had started, a flight lieutenant and four skilled airmen would be loaned by the RAF to serve as advisors to the new Egyptian force. In the fourth year, comparable advisors would be loaned to help with general staff work and the establishment of stores and repair sections. Commercial aviation was not forgotten, and plans were drawn up for two aerodromes to be developed near Cairo and Alexandria. Squadron Leader Long managed to persuade the Egyptian government that it would not be a good idea to have Egyptian personnel trained in other European countries, which had been suggested. However, there were those in the British Foreign Office who still feared that any increase in Egyptian military effectiveness could threaten British imperial interests. Furthermore, it might encourage similar ideas elsewhere, especially in Iraq. Fortunately, this remained a minority view, with greater sympathy for Egypt being better able to combat smuggling, if nothing more ambitious than that.

Opinions within the upper echelons of the British military in Egypt were similarly mixed, with those in command in the Canal Zone being firmly against any Egyptian aeroplanes being stationed there. To counter such a supposed threat, it was suggested that any Egyptian flying units be stationed close enough to the Canal Zone to be easily dealt with if they caused trouble; namely within 65-80km of the strategic waterway. On the other hand, Air Vice-Marshal Oliver Swann, the new Air Officer Commanding RAF Middle East, suggested that such units should be kept as close as possible to the RAF and that the Egyptians be offered 'suitable' aeroplanes, fearing that otherwise they would look elsewhere for equipment.

Continuing political tensions inside the Egyptian government, and between Egypt and Britain, meant that nothing further was done during 1927. But the following year things started to move again, as King Fu'ad brought his considerable influence and powers of patronage to bear. The Wafd Party had returned as a powerful force in the Egyptian parliament, though its leader, Nahas Pasha, was not Prime Minister. Instead, the government was formed by the Liberal Constitutional Party, and early in 1927 the parliament voted to allocate funds for an increase in the size of the Egyptian Army as well as for the creation of an air force.

In response, the British High Commissioner, Lord George Lloyd, insisted that nothing be done to change the position or function of the Egyptian Army's British Inspector General and that the new air arm must have a British second-in-command. A letter dated 9 May 1927 from the British Air Officer Commanding RAF Middle East was more practical and less political in tone. He noted that the primary tasks of any Egyptian air units would be anti-contraband work, assisting in controlling the movement of desert tribes and promoting rapid communication between various positions of the Frontier Districts Administration. He

also noted that Major General Charlton Watson Spinks ('Spinks Pasha', the successor of Lee Stack and the last British Inspector General of the Egyptian Army) was closely watching the evolution of this scheme.

For the Egyptian authorities the focus remained on practical matters such as costs, allowances and the medical support that would be needed for any officers sent to Britain for training. As yet, the British did not seem to have agreed to this part of the plan and were still worrying that RAF training facilities in Egypt, such as No. 4 Flying Training School (FTS) at Abu Suwayr in the Canal Zone, could not cope with an additional load. Instead, Heliopolis outside Cairo was suggested, or indeed anywhere except Abu Suwayr.

The selection of Egyptian officers to be trained as the country's first military pilots began in 1928, with a call for volunteers from the junior ranks of the Egyptian Army. These men were already commissioned officers, not cadets, and about 200 promptly put their names forward. Competition was extremely stiff, especially when it came to the medical examination, and a provisional list of 10 names was drawn up. In October 1928, the 10 were whittled down to five men to be trained by the RAF in Egypt. One dropped out, perhaps failing an initial test at the RAF Flying Training School at Abu Suwayr. This left four young subalterns to learn to fly at the RAF aerodrome.

The majority of Egyptian Air Force pilots, at least until the major expansions of the late 1940s and 1950s, were drawn from just below the aristocratic Pasha class. They were, in fact, mostly upper middle or middle class men and, like these sections of Egyptian society, were of varied cultural and family origins, including Arab Egyptians, Arabised Circassians and Arabised Turks. The first four were *Mulazim Awal* (First Lieutenants) Muhammad Abd al-Muna'im al-Miqaati, Fu'ad Abd al-Hamid Haggag (Hajjaj) and Ahmad Nagi, along with *Mulazim Thani* (Second Lieutenant) Ahmad Ibrahim Abd al-Raziq. Miqaati had been born on 8 July 1904, while Raziq was around the same age. Haggag was born on 10 June 1907 and was linked to the Egyptian royal family, reportedly having married one of King Fu'ad's sisters, while Nagi's family background is less clear.

Where these first Egyptian military pilots would receive their flying training remained an open question. Virtually all senior officers in the RAF were opposed to this being done in the United Kingdom, declaring that such an idea was foredoomed to failure. To some extent this fear was based upon widely accepted racist stereotypes concerning 'Oriental depravity'. It was even suggested that to send "full grown Egyptians" to a school "which is an establishment for training boys" would pose a serious moral threat to those boys. As far as is known, Miqaati, Haggag, Nagi and Raziq seemed unaware of such offensive comments.

On 2 January 1929, Spinks Pasha received a letter from the British Embassy announcing that the High Commissioner had at last agreed to the proposed establishment of an Egyptian air force. Even so, the question of training remained unresolved until, exactly a fortnight later, a letter from the Egyptian Minister of War and Marine, Ja'afar Wali, confirmed that the first Egyptian Army lieutenants would learn to fly at No. 4 Flying Training School at Abu Suwayr. Here, Miqaati, Raziq and Haggag learned on the Avro 504N, followed by the DH.9 and the twin-engined Vickers Vimy.

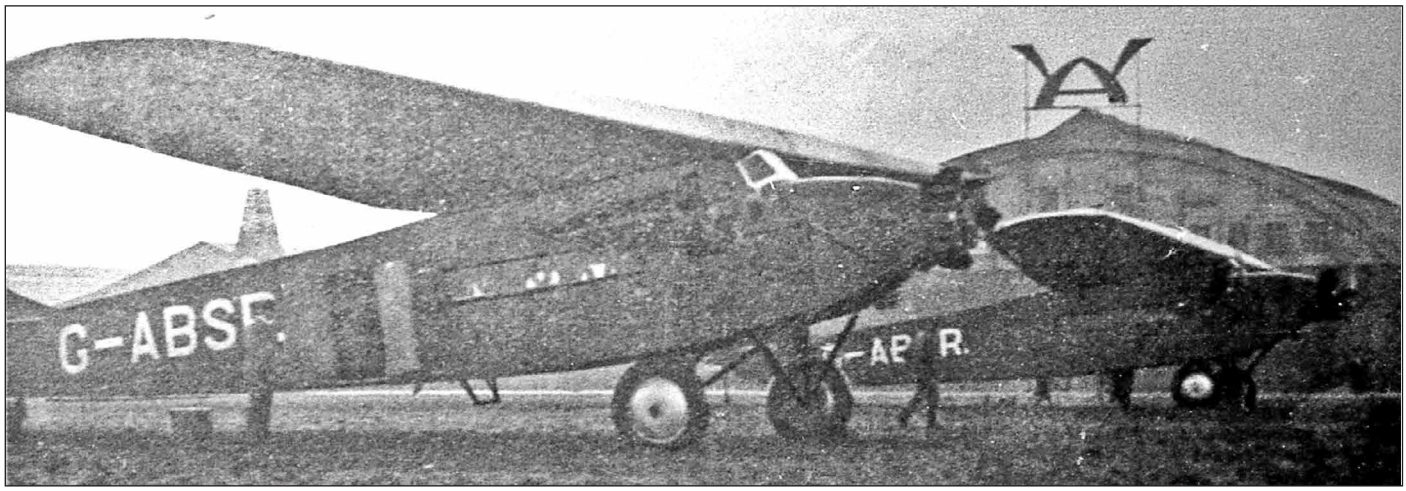
It was to be an all-round training programme which included engine and airframe maintenance. The young officers completed their training late in 1929, Miqaati and Raziq being the first to earn their wings, Miqaati doing so near the end of 1929. Haggag was slightly later than the others, being awarded his wings on 31 January 1930 after 226 flying hours, including two on an Armstrong Whitworth Atlas when he was temporarily attached to the RAF's No. 13 Army Cooperation Squadron, apparently in the UK. On 3 March 1930, the RAF held its annual display at Abu Suwayr, in which the three newly qualified Egyptian pilots took part, though it is not certain that they flew. Ahmad Nagi was the youngest and least experienced of this group and did not receive his wings at the RAF's No. 4 FTS until early in 1932.

The Egyptian Army would lobby strenuously in 1930 for a settlement of various unresolved questions concerning its future air arm. Meanwhile, Muhammad Sidqi, who had recently arrived after his flight from England, was recruited as a consultant by the new Egyptian government's Minister of Defence. On 4 June 1930, the RAF Middle East Headquarters in Egypt sent an urgent letter to the Air Ministry in London, expressing fears that the three newly trained Egyptian pilots would lose their hard-earned skills if there were no aeroplanes on which they could continue training. Furthermore, if they then returned to flying after a significant gap, and crashed because of a lack of practice, the RAF might find itself blamed. RAF Middle East Headquarters therefore stated that it was high time than an Egyptian squadron be formed.

As this was not an immediate option, it was agreed that Miqaati, Raziq and Haggag be sent to Britain to continue their training as soon as possible. They sailed aboard a P&O liner on 4 August, arriving in England 11 days later and being taken straight to the Director of the Egyptian Education Office in London. He then presented them to the Air Ministry's Director of Training. When interviewed by the author in 1970, Muhammad Abd al-Muna'im al-Miqaati recalled the subsequent months, training on the Avro 618 'Ten' tri-motor and de Havilland DH.60 Gispy Moth, with considerable pleasure. The Avro 'Ten' was a licence-built Fokker FVIIB/3m and was called the 'Ten' because it could carry eight passengers plus two crew. Miqaati himself was also sent to RAF Eastchurch on the Isle of Sheppey in Kent for specialist training as an armaments officer. Here, he also flew the Bristol F2B Fighter, Armstrong Whitworth Siskin, de Havilland DH.9 and Westland Wapiti.

The latter had been introduced to replace the RAF's DH.9A and Bristol Fighter in late 1920, both of these designs having been of First World War vintage. Rugged, reliable and designed for colonial service, the Westland Wapiti nevertheless had a number of problems, being notoriously difficult for new or inexperienced pilots to land or take off. Nose-heavy, with a tendency to flip over on landing and to lurch sideways on take off or landing, three RAF Wapitis were crashed by No. 30 Squadron in Iraq within the first week that the squadron received them in 1930. As a training machine, it also had to be taxied fast with the joystick pulled back to avoid tipping the aeroplane onto its nose.

Hubert Leonard Patch, the well-known rugby player and later an Air Chief Marshal, was safety officer at RAF Eastchurch at the time, and Miqaati recalled how Patch "blew him up" for taxiing too fast. Patch's nickname was 'Sam', presumably after the famous American daredevil Sam Patch, known as 'the Yankee Leaper', who had earned notoriety for jumping into the Niagara river near the base of Niagara Falls in 1829 and dying as a consequence. As the two men were of virtually equal rank, Miqaati's response to Patch was, "OK, try it yourself". 'Sam' Patch did so, and after 50 metres he had the Wapiti on its nose.



Two British civilian registered Avro 618s (G-ABSP, c.n. 525, and G-ABSR, c.n. 526) ready to leave Heston aerodrome, west of London, for Cairo in January 1932. They would become Egypt's first two military aeroplanes, arriving before the first flight of de Havilland Moths and the official establishment of the EAAF. The Avro 618s were then given EAAF serial numbers F200 and F201. (EAF Museum)

Miqaati and Patch apparently remained in touch, and while Miqaati rose to become the highest-ranking officer in the Royal Egyptian Air Force before the coup of 1952, Patch fought with distinction during the Second World War, became Commandant of the RAF's Aeroplane and Armament Experimental Establishment in 1948, Air Officer Command-in-Chief Fighter Command in January 1956 and C-in-C RAF Middle East Air Force in September that year, just in time to command the RAF's air assault upon Egypt in the Suez War of 1956.

Meanwhile, Raziq and Haggag travelled to RAF Calshot for specialist navigation training, during which Haggag smashed an Armstrong Whitworth Atlas (serial number J8779) on 9 December 1930, though without serious injury to himself. Back in Egypt, Minister of War Muhammad Tawfiq Rifa'at Pasha, Minister of Communications Tawfiq Duss Pasha and General Spinks Pasha, the British Inspector General of the Egyptian Army, were shown around the depot workshops and stores of the RAF Depot Middle East at Abu Qir on 15 September that year. They needed to learn as much as possible about the perhaps tedious but vital role of workshops and stores for Egypt's forthcoming air force.

Eleven days later, Tawfiq Rifa'at Pasha and General Spinks concluded an agreement for the formation of an Egyptian air force under British supervision, which was to start with just five aeroplanes. At the time there were three Egyptians under training in England (Miqaati, Raziq and Haggag), with five other men currently attached to the RAF's FTS at Abu Suwayr. The Egyptians had originally hoped to have 10 men at Abu Suwayr, but this was reduced by half for budgetary reasons.

Finances were still very tight in 1931, but on 27 May the Egyptian Council of Ministers gave authorisation for five aeroplanes to be purchased, with hangers and other buildings to be erected at Almaza aerodrome north-east of Cairo. Under Decree Law No. 86 of 1931, they allocated 50,000 Egyptian pounds for this purpose to cover the first year. At the time, however, Almaza – also known as Misr al-Jadidah – was just a small civilian airfield. Its director was Kamil Eloui Bey, the Egyptian pilot who owned the first aeroplane on the Egyptian civilian register, a de Havilland DH.60 Moth registered as SU-AAA in May 1931. Described as quiet-spoken and energetic, Kamil Eloui Bey became the Managing Director of Misr Airwork (later renamed as Misr Airways and then Misrair) on 7 June 1932.

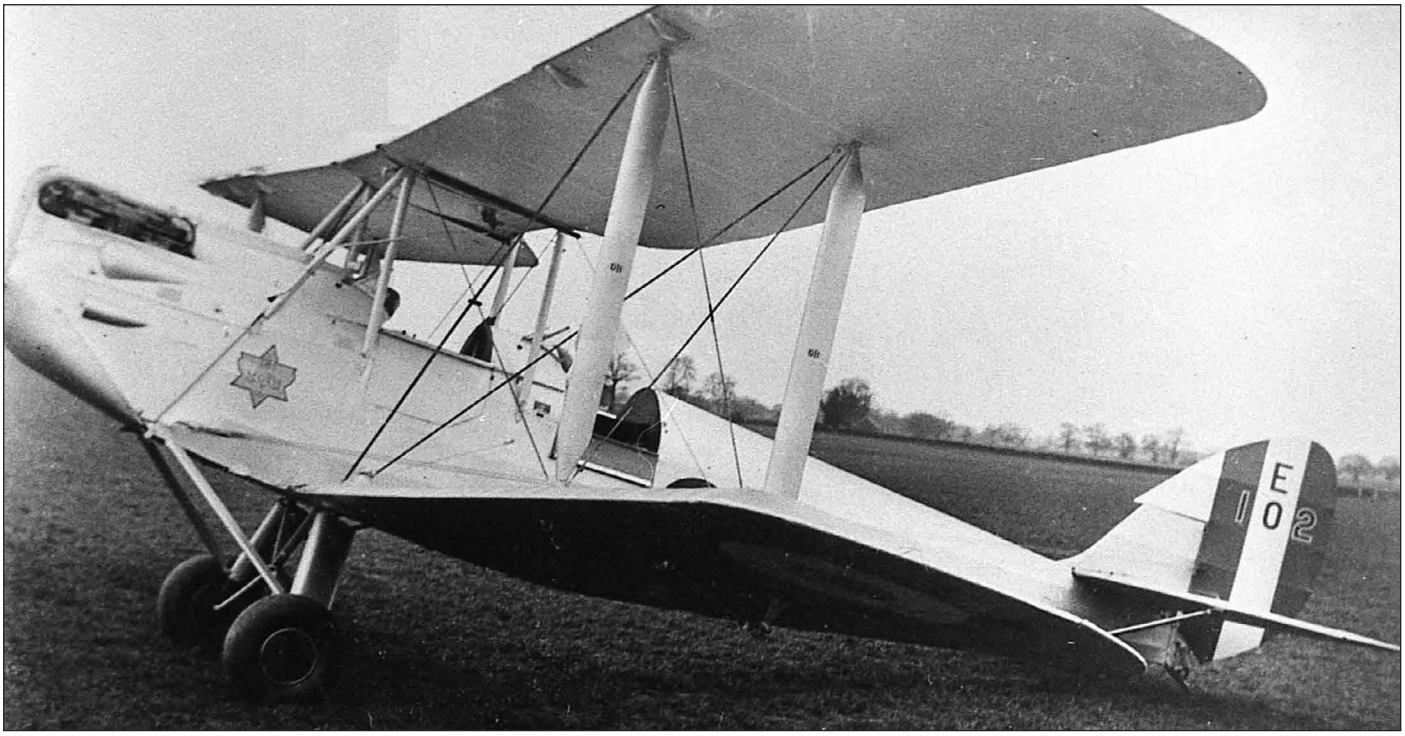
Decree Law No. 86 authorised the new force to have one air staff officer (British), one flight commander (British), three flying officers (Egyptian), one staff officer (Egyptian) and five civilian advisors (British), plus 46 mechanics, tradesmen, clerks and unskilled labourers (all Egyptian). On 2 November 1931, Air Commodore Andrew George Board was seconded from the RAF to serve as the Director of Egyptian Military Aviation. He was an experienced officer, having spent the previous four years as RAF Middle East Headquarters Command's Chief Staff Officer in Cairo. Board originally learned to fly at Hendon before the First World War (gaining the Royal Aero Club's certificate no. 36 in 1910) before being seconded to the RFC in 1913. During the Great War, he had served in France and became one of the oldest pilots in the RAF. Unfortunately, Air Commodore Board was a soldier rather than a diplomat and would retire from the RAF later in 1931 after causing a rumpus between the British and Egyptian governments. Nevertheless, he would return to the colours in 1939, serving as a group captain before finally retiring for good in 1941.

In the meantime, Egypt's first three qualified military pilots had completed their training, but there was no Egyptian air force in which they could serve. Instead, they returned to their Egyptian Army regiments to await events; Miqaati to the 7th Infantry Battalion at al-Arish, Raziq and Haggag to the 4th Infantry Battalion. They naturally felt frustrated, especially as the new Iraqi Air Force's first aeroplanes were flown from England to Baghdad, where they arrived on 22 April 1931. Egyptian pride had been hurt by this Iraqi achievement, and subsequent events did nothing to sooth that hurt. Ahmad Nagi was perhaps fortunate in currently still being under training at Abu Suwayr.

The British de Havilland company had secured a contract to supply Egypt with six rather than the originally intended five DH.60T Gipsy Moth Trainers (c.n. 1734-1738, Egyptian serial numbers E101-105, though in a sequence opposite to that of the construction numbers, plus c.n. 1799 with serial number E106). They were powered by Gipsy II engines and cost £7,000 each. The DH.60T was a military version of the basic Gipsy Moth in which the inner wing bracing wires were slightly rearranged to make it easier for pilots wearing parachutes to get in and out of the front cockpit. These aeroplanes would also be fitted with full dual control, plus radios and racks for small bombs.

Two second-hand Avro 618 'Tens' were similarly purchased. As a licence-built version of the famous Fokker 10-seater, this three-engine passenger aircraft had been intended for sale throughout the British Empire, with the exception of Canada. However,

Egypt's first de Havilland DH.60M Moths in the first style of markings, applied before Air Comm. A.G. Board attempted to transport the machines by sea from the UK. They are lined up at Stag Lane aerodrome and have Egyptian flags rather than roundels on their wings and fuselages, while also lacking serial numbers. (Egyptian Air Force Museum archive)



Having been returned to the UK after completing half their journey to Egypt in packing crates, the Egyptian de Havilland DH.60M Moths were given modern-style national markings and serial numbers. E102 was probably the machine in which Mulazim Awal al-Miqaati flew home. (Miqaati family archive)

The first delivery of de Havilland DH.60M Moths of what would become the Egyptian Army Air Force, before setting off for Egypt. (Egyptian Air Force Museum archive)

The EAAF's first Flight of DH.60 Moths either shortly before or shortly after before their flight to Egypt. In the centre is Air Comm. V.H. Tait. (V.H. Tait archive)

the RAF did not trust the Avro 'Ten's' one-piece cantilever wing and welded steel fuselage, so it was not manufactured in large numbers. The machine also differed from the original Fokker FVIIB/3m in having its central engine tilted slightly downwards due to British airworthiness regulations. Usually powered by Armstrong Siddeley Lynx IVB radial engines, the aircraft had a range of around 650km. Three of the 14 Avro 618 'Tens' built were originally intended for new air routes from Britain to India, but when financial problems caused that project to fail, one of the aeroplanes was sent to Indian State Airways for the British Viceroy's own use while the others were sold via the Airworks representative in Cairo to the Egyptian government. After having wirelesses fitted by Airworks at Woodford aerodrome in north-west England, they were flown to Egypt by Flight Lieutenant Christopher Clarkson and Captain Dan Cameron, landing at the RAF aerodrome at Abu Qir on 18 January 1932. Amongst the passengers was Captain Stocks, who would join Air Commodore Board in the initial stages of establishing the Egyptian Army Air Force. These machines therefore became the Egyptian Air Force's first aeroplanes.

Later in 1931, the four Egyptian military pilots were at last sent to England to collect their aeroplanes. The British government wanted minimal publicity, which was in complete contrast to their attitude during the delivery flight of the first Iraqi machines. Meanwhile, the Egyptian pilots went to see Dr Hafiz Afifi Pasha, the Egyptian ambassador in London, while King Fu'ad made clear his emphatic wish that the Egyptian aircraft be flown to Egypt with maximum publicity.

Miqaati, Raziq and Haggag first went up in their Egyptian Gipsy Moths close to Christmas 1931, while several photographs were taken of these aeroplanes neatly lined up in new markings. Judging by the buildings in the background of one such photograph, they were at de Havilland's earlier and smaller aerodrome at Stag Lane in Edgware, north London, rather than the main de Havilland aerodrome outside Hatfield in Hertfordshire. The Moths also had unusual national markings, which included large Egyptian flags painted on top of their upper wings, strongly reminiscent of the markings worn by Ottoman military aircraft before the First World War (see Volume One). This is likely to have been a political statement, perhaps recalling the Egyptian royal family's Ottoman roots, though the flags would soon be replaced by more orthodox green and white roundels with an Egyptian crescent and three stars in the centre.

On 11 January 1932, the two Avro 'Ten' aircraft left Heston and were flown to Cairo by British pilots Clarkson and Cameron. Unlike the Moths, the Avros still wore British civilian registrations G-ABSP (c.n. 525) and G-ABSR (c.n. 526). However, the bad weather of winter and early spring meant that it was inadvisable for the little DH.60 Gipsy Moths to make the flight. The Avro 'Tens' thus stood idle in Cairo for several months awaiting the arrival of their smaller colleagues and the formal creation of the Egyptian Air Force. G-ABSP would be given the Egyptian serial number F200, while G-ABSR became F201.

Air Commodore Board was, meanwhile, eager for the Moths to be sent to Egypt and for the air force to be established. Without authorisation from the Egyptian government, he decided that they should be sent by sea in crates, to be followed by the Egyptian pilots. He may also have had in mind the fact that, in early 1932, the last embers of resistance to Italian rule in Libya were still being stamped out, while the Moths' short range meant that they would have to make several refuelling stops in that troubled Italian colony. It is also worth noting that the Italian crushing of Libyan resistance had a profound impact upon the Egyptian people, who were appalled, especially by an Italian policy of shooting anyone who attempted to cross their formidable border fence with Egypt (see Volume Three).

As soon as news of Board's decision reached Egypt, some of the more anti-British newspapers exploded in outrage, claiming that Egypt was being humiliated. The first Iraqi aeroplanes had, of course, been delivered to their country by air, flown by Iraqi pilots. *Al-Balagh*, one such Cairo daily with a strongly Islamic editorial direction, had already quoted a statement from the Egyptian Ministry of War admitting that it was hoping for "the service of British pilots, engineers and other experts for the new

air force since it is difficult to find them among Egyptians".

This newspaper now accused the Egyptian government of organising the forthcoming Egyptian Air Force in a manner inconsistent with Egyptian interests, and which would place the air above Egypt in the hands of the British. This it called "a crime against the country and its future", though it also admitted that the Ministry of War was correct when it had said that "Egyptians were not born trained in the art of aviation and that airplanes are not sown like cotton in the land of Egypt". However, *Al-Balagh* pointed out that this was also true of other countries in the region, and added that Iraq had relied on Iraqi pilots, with the assistance of a few Britons who could be counted on the fingers of one hand.

Cairo's leading English-language newspaper, *The Egyptian Gazette*, took a softer line, but nevertheless described the affair as an "an unfortunate incident" which had marred the formation of the country's air force. An editorial in *The Egyptian Gazette* also expressed its opinion that it had been "contrary to Egypt's dignity that the planes should not be flown, as machines ordered to the Iraqian Air Force were flown out by Iraqian officers trained in England".

The Egyptian government now found itself in a difficult position, caught between a delicate relationship with Britain and increasingly vocal complaints from much of the Egyptian public. The Egyptian authorities therefore put their foot down and insisted that the Egyptian DH.60 Moths must be flown to Egypt by Egyptian pilots. By now, the ship carrying the crated aeroplanes was sailing down the Atlantic coast of the Iberian Peninsula; its captain was promptly ordered to head for Gibraltar, where the crated Moths would be unloaded, prior to being sent back to England. The Egyptian pilots had not yet left Britain, though they were soon due to board ship for Alexandria. They were therefore ordered to remain where they were.

Muhammad Abd al-Muna'im al-Miqaati salutes from the rear cockpit of a de Havilland DH.60M Moth at the start of the first delivery flight from Lympne in southern England. (Miqaati family archive)

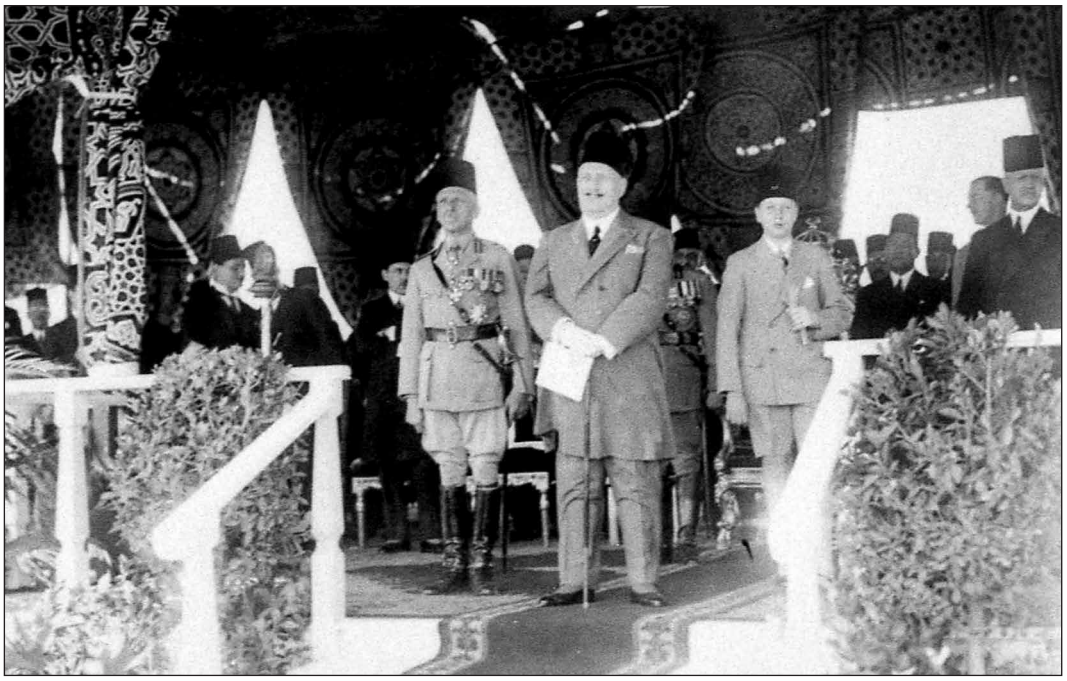
Egyptian de Havilland DH.60M Moth during their delivery flight across Europe. (V.H. Tait archive)

The arrival of the Egyptian Army's first pilots at Almaza on 21 June 1932 attracted huge crowds, the pilots in their "flying topees" being mobbed by men in fezes, boaters, trilbys and at least one top hat. In the background are the de Havilland Moths while on the far right the wing of one of the Avro 618s now clearly has EAAF roundels. (V.H. Tait archive)

Feeling that his authority and position had been compromised, Air Commodore Board resigned on or around 12 April 1932. At first the Egyptian Ministry of War refused to accept his resignation, but they soon came to the conclusion that it was best that he should go. Board's replacement was Squadron Leader Victor Hubert Tait, a Canadian officer who had transferred in 1917 to the RFC, where, as an equipment officer, he specialised in signals and wireless. After serving in Constantinople from 1922-23 during the

Allied occupation of what was still technically the Ottoman capital, Tait was appointed to the Staff of the RAF Headquarters in Cairo in 1930. Now, on 6 October 1932, he found himself attached to the Egyptian Army with the rank of *Qa'im-Maqam* (*Kaimmakam*, or lieutenant colonel).

Just over two months earlier, on 1 August, Air Commodore Christopher Joseph Quintin Brand had also been 'loaned' to the Egyptian government, to become its Director General of Aviation. After being the most successful RFC/RAF night-fighter pilot during the Great War, this South African airman had a distinguished inter-war career. It included flying with Lieutenant Colonel Pierre van Ryneveld in a Vickers Vimy on the first flight from England to South Africa in 1920, although they did not receive official acknowledgement for the feat because they were obliged to complete their journey in a DH.9. In 1929, Brand was posted as a senior technical officer to the strategically vital RAF depot and aerodrome at Abu Qir in Egypt, before being seconded to the Egyptian government.

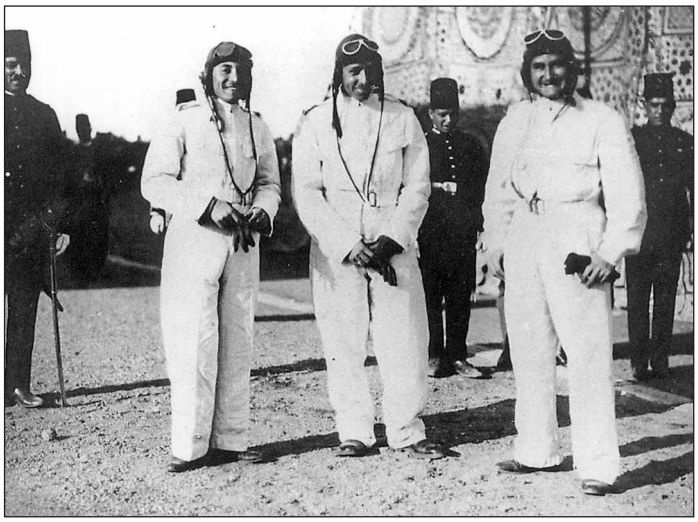


King Fu'ad of Egypt flanked by his 12-year-old son Prince Faruq on the right and Maj. Gen. C.W. Spinks (Spinks Pasha), the last British Inspector General of the Egyptian Army on the left, watching the arrival of first EAAF Moths at Almaza. (Egyptian Air Force Museum archive)

When interviewed by the author, Victor Hubert Tait recalled how he had initially been asked by Misr Airwork to become Egypt's Director of Civil Aviation. He had agreed, but then found there was confusion about just whose authority he would be working under. Hence Tait ended up as Commander of the Egyptian Army Air Force under General Spinks Pasha, while Air Commodore Brand got the job of Director of Egyptian Civil Aviation. Tait is also unusual in being almost the only senior British 'imperialist' officer to be recalled with affection and respect in Arab histories of the Egyptian Air Force, even those written in stridently 'anti-imperialist' late 20th-century Egypt. For example, Ali Muhammad Labib, in his *Al-Quwat al-Thalathah,* wrote: "Appreciation and credit must be given to Tait Bey, the man who was responsible for leading Egypt during its aviation infancy … No doubt the Egyptian Air Force is indebted to his services which disregarded the politics of the time."

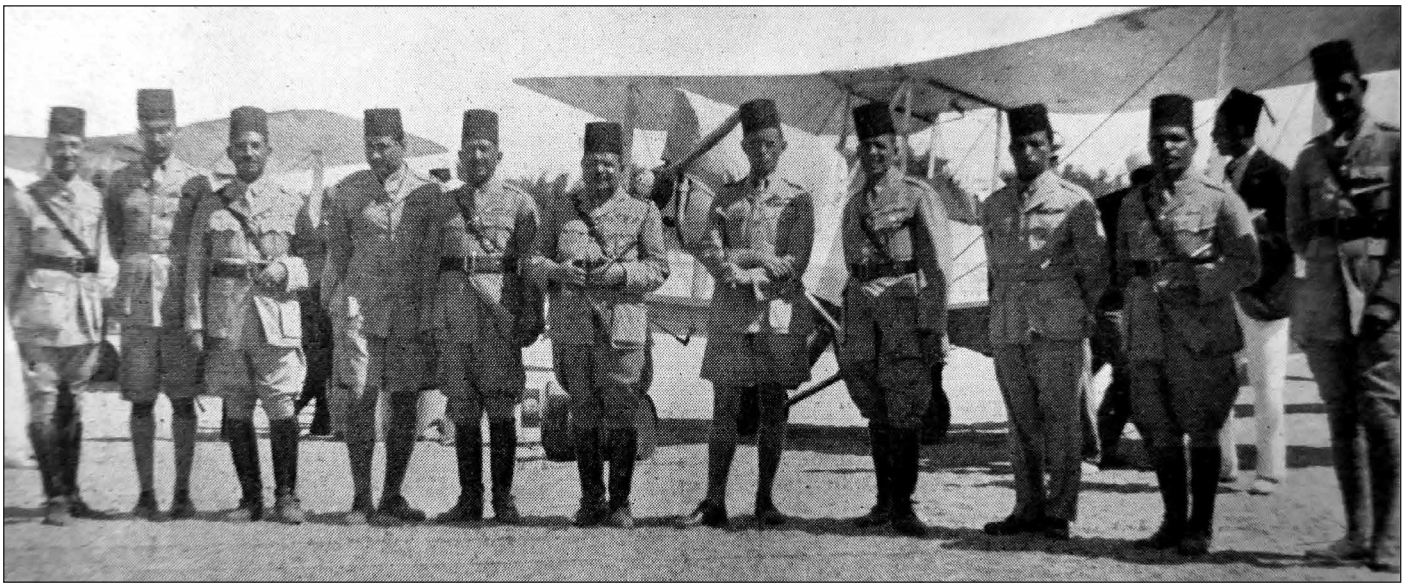
According to *Qa'im-Maqam* Tait, all ground crew personnel of what became the Egyptian Army Air Force were former military conscripts, plus a small number of civilian mechanics. The best were drawn from the Police and Fire Brigade, who already had some technical knowledge, and these were clearly favoured for advancement. Many subsequently returned to the Police or Fire Brigade at the end of their military service, so that, by the outbreak of the Second World War, Tait recalled that almost half the Traffic Division of the Cairo Police were ex-Air Force men. As a result, Tait was recognised by these men and tended to be waved through the traffic "as if I were the King himself".

Tait also recruited many civilian technicians and started an apprentice school for them; these men later joined the ranks of the Egyptian Air Force as technicians. There were also plenty of good sailmakers from the River Nile whose skills could be transferred



Understandably it was Egypt's first three military pilots, Haggag, Miqaati and Raziq, who received most attention after they and their British colleagues landed outside Cairo. (Miqaati family archive)

The flying topee was a small version of the normal topee or cork "sun helmet" for use in the air. It was issued to both the EAAF and the RAF, but was never popular. Here an Egyptian pilot in such a flying topee gets out of one of the EAAF's DH.60M Moths. (Egyptian Air Force Museum archive)



The EAAF's first squadron DH.60M Moths at Assyut early in 1933. Fifth from the right is Jack Cottle wearing shorts, next to the somewhat rotund Officer Commanding the major Egyptian garrison and military training base at Manqabad. On the far left is the Sub-Mudir or deputy governor of Assyut province. (Mikaati family archive)

to the fabric-covered aeroplanes of the time. Other official British sources record that mechanics for the EAAF (Egyptian Army Air Force, as it was originally named) and subsequently for the REAF (Royal Egyptian Air Force) were trained at the RAF depot in Abu Qir.

Two exceptions to the general anonymity of these essential groundcrew were named Zakaria and Surur (Sourour). Both were civilian craftsmen, recruited in 1932, who continued to be employed by the Egyptian Air Force until at least 1985. By that time, they were working in the 'medium class aircraft depot' at Almaza. Known to the Egyptian pilots as Uncle Zakaria and Uncle Surur, their ability to mend dents caused by minor bumps inside the EAF's constricted hardened or bombproof hangers became proverbial.

Towards the end of their careers, which spanned over half a century, Zakaria and Surur were invited to the EAF's fighter base outside al-Mansura in the Nile Delta. There, these 'old guys' regaled their hosts, including several quite senior officers, with stories about the EAAF's first DH.60 Moths and their pilots. On occasions, they recalled, all the military and civilian groundcrew at Almaza would form a long corridor, with the men facing each other. The Moth's crew, perhaps starting out upon a particularly significant flight, had to walk down this corridor while the groundcrew clapped and repeatedly shouted "Hey! Hey! Hey!" According to Zakaria and Surur, crews would also sometimes be lifted aloft and carried along like wrestlers to the arena.

Tait now had to select a small number of other British officers to assist him. These he chose from the RAF's Home and Middle East Commands. One of the three eventually selected, Sidney Norman Webster, was a personal friend who was well-known because of his victories in the Coupe d'Aviation Maritime Jacques Schneider, popularly known as the Schneider Trophy. He had won this race in Venice in 1927, flying a Supermarine S.5 seaplane. Webster was also a football player who once captained the RAF team, and Tait strongly believed that physical sports should play a major role in forging an *esprit de corps* in the Egyptian Air Force.

Another man who was chosen, Flight Lieutenant S.J. Stocks, was a short-service officer who had then gone to Imperial Airways where he flew flying boats. Bad luck caused Stocks to run one of the Imperial Airways flying boats ashore at Marsa Matruh, so he was now available for another job. After flying back to Egypt in one of the country's first Avro 618 'Tens', Flight Lieutenant Stocks became the Egyptian Army's chief flying instructor, in which role he would become a close friend of Muhammad Sidqi after the latter became Misr Airwork's senior pilot and instructor. Stocks later retired to Australia, where he died in 1984, four years before Tait himself, who passed away in his native Canada aged 96. The third man was Jack Cottle, who had served in the RFC as a conscripted officer before becoming a regular officer in the RAF. He eventually retired to India, where he later died.

The British Air Ministry was helpful in allowing Tait to select RAF NCOs for service in the Egyptian Air Force. This he did partly on the basis of their technical skills, but also on their athletic or sporting abilities, and therefore chose some who had been champion RAF boxers or runners. There would be about 40 such RAF NCOs attached to the Egyptian Air Force by the time Tait left in 1940; amongst other duties, they would advise the service's technical schools at Almaza.

In an interview with the author, *Qa'im-Maqam* Tait explained how he selected new aerodromes. Almaza outside Cairo and Dakhailah near Alexandria had been wholly or partially civilian airfields. Otherwise, Tait simply chose a suitable piece of desert, had the ground cleared of stones and a windsock erected. Tait also recalled that the Egyptian experienced very little trouble with their equipment in desert conditions, though the dust-laden desert wind known as the *khamsin* was a problem. Even so, while the *khamsin* occasionally shut down civil aviation in Egypt, the military normally carried on flying.

Meanwhile, early 1932 saw the establishment of the Misr Airworks Company as the first Arab-owned and Arab-operated domestic airline in an Arab country. However, it still had no commercial passenger aeroplanes, and most of Misr Airwork's first pilots, as distinct from co-pilots, would continue to be recruited in Europe for some years. The most important exception was, of course, Muhammad Sidqi, who was probably now training for his multi-engine aeroplane pilot's certificate.

A report published in London on 20 April 1932 stated that Egypt's crated Gipsy Moths were now back at the Stag Lane aerodrome. There they would be reassembled, with the Egyptian pilots assisting in the work as part of their continuing training.

Egyptian Army Air Force personnel training in the use of semaphore flags with four EAAF DH.60M Moths in the background. (Egyptian Air Force Museum archive)

The Moths were now partially repainted, because, when they were again photographed – this time at Hatfield – they had normal roundels on their wings and fuselages. The resulting picture was published in *The Times* on 19 May that year. There was no anxiety concerning the aeroplanes or their pilots for their long-distance journey, only about the weather and conditions of aerodromes along their flightpath to Cairo. Nevertheless, an additional British pilot proved necessary because the recently qualified *Mulazim* Nagi fell ill and had to return to Egypt by sea. This left *Mulazim Thani* al-Raziq, *Mulazim* Miqaati, *Mulazim* Haggag and their British colleagues, Stocks and Cottle, to set off with a faster timetable – eight days – than that followed by the Iraqis the previous year.

Unfortunately, bad weather over Western Europe caused their departure to be postponed several times, much to the annoyance of an unsympathetic Egyptian press. Some in the EAAF considered that the real, though not the official, birth of their service was 23 May 1932, when the three Egyptian and two British pilots took off from Lympne on the southern coast of England, after a politically charged delay of seven weeks. They did so at 1400 hours on the first leg of their delivery flight to Egypt. Men and machines were seen off by the Egyptian ambassador in London and reached Le Bourget outside Paris at 1630 hours.

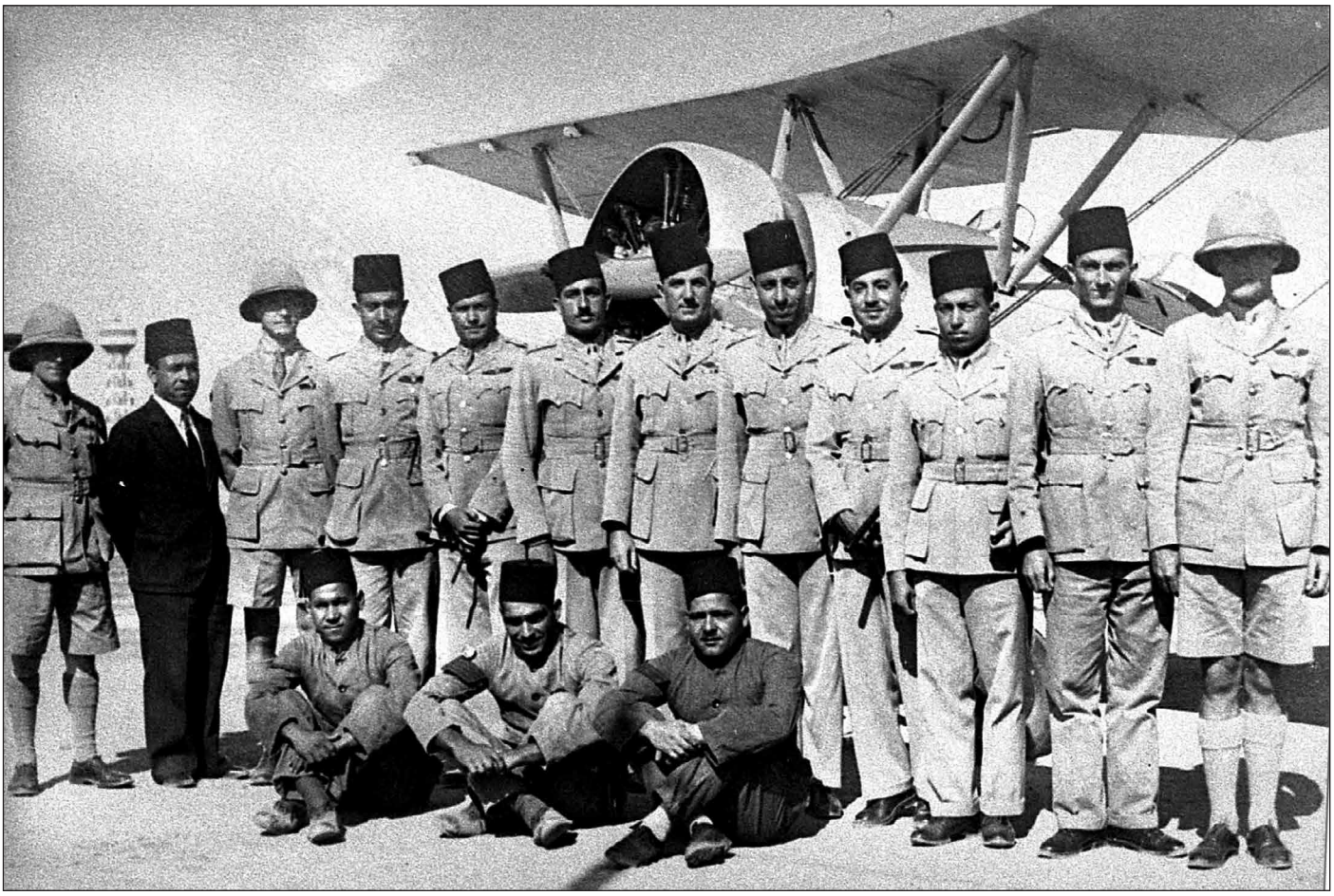
The planned route would send the Gipsy Moths via Lyon, Marseilles, Pisa and Rome to Naples. Here, there would be two days' pause for a thorough engine inspection before flying across the Mediterranean. After Naples, the Moths pressed on to Catania in Sicily, then Malta, before arriving in Africa at Tripoli. This was followed by refuelling stops at Sirte and Benghazi, where the Shell Oil Company took their own publicity photographs, one of which appeared in *The Aeroplane* magazine on 20 July. There was a further pause at Tobruk, before the Egyptian Moths reached their homeland at Marsa Matruh. Then it was on to Abu Qir east of Alexandria and finally Cairo.

An English account on the arrival of the five Egyptian Gipsy Moths at Almaza aerodrome, the future home of the Egyptian Air Force, on 21 June 1932 stated that the reporting of their departure and flight to Egypt had been accompanied by "a great deal of slightly unpleasant publicity – due to no fault of the pilots". That morning, the machines circled Cairo twice, in order to show themselves to as many people as possible before landing. They were accompanied by one of the Avro 'Tens' which had been waiting in Egypt for almost five months, and which had taken off to join the Moths. It was flown by one of the British pilots on secondment to the Egyptian Army, though exactly who was unrecorded.

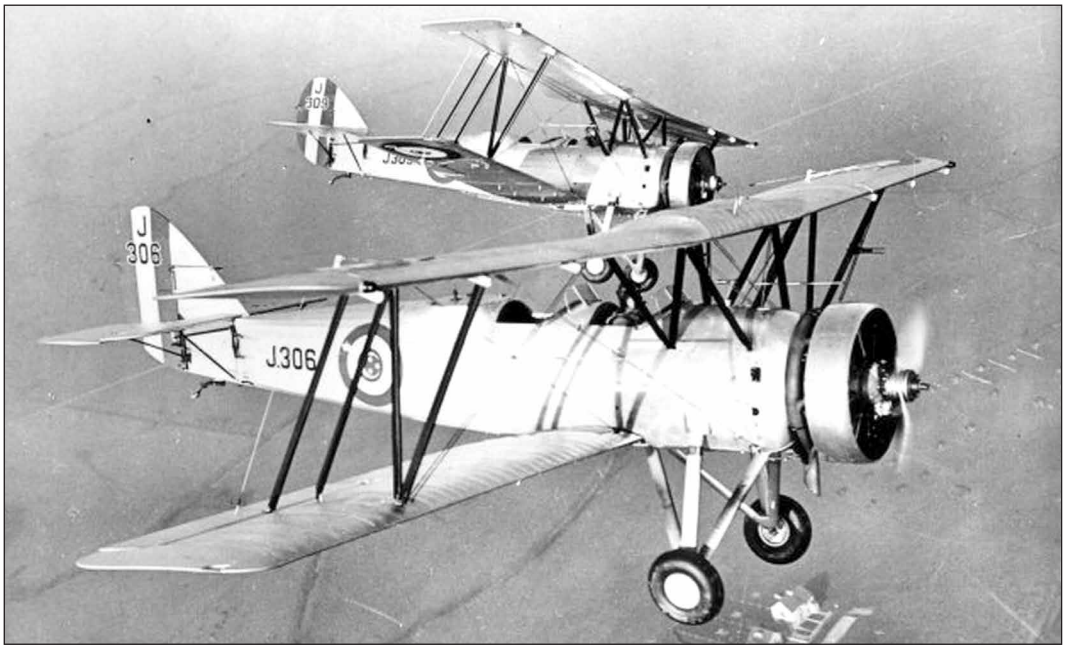
After landing, the aeroplanes taxied to a specially constructed royal stand where King Fu'ad, Prince Faruq, the diplomatic corps, government ministers and other dignitaries were waiting. The crews then got out of the cockpits of their DH Moths and were seen to be wearing a form of headgear which was also issued to RAF airmen in the Middle East. This was the white 'flying topee'. It was never popular and, even in the 1920s and 1930s, was widely regarded as a peculiar fashion. According to Alfred Earle of No. 55 Squadron RAF, very few people wore a flying topee, which he described as a small pith sun helmet, as developed in British India, with flaps which came down over the wearer's ears and secured by a strap.

The Egyptian ruler then "warmly congratulated" his Egyptian pilots, and upon the completion of this ceremonial part of the proceedings, "the crowd, which had been very orderly, broke through the cordons and rushed towards the planes, mobbing the airmen". Officially, it was this ceremonial greeting which marked the creation of the Egyptian Army Air Force, as well as the inauguration of Almaza as the EAAF's home base. Furthermore, this was the first time since the Heliopolis Air Meeting in 1910 that Egyptians had held such a high-profile aviation event in their own right. Stands decorated with flags had been built for onlookers on one side of the aerodrome, while contingents from the Egyptian Army were drawn up almost facing them, with "cavalry on the right, infantry in the centre and light gun sections on the left. The massed bands of the Egyptian Army were in the middle of the aerodrome." Next came a march past, which, for some reason known only to the organisers, was done to the patriotic Welsh song 'Men of Harlech'. Perhaps the British had a hand in this choice.

Many people hoped that the creation of the EAAF would further encourage aviation in Egypt, especially as Misr Airwork still only existed as a company plus flying school and had yet to start commercial passenger flights. Almost exactly a month after the ceremonies at Almaza, the Egyptian Prime Minister, Isma'il Sidqi Pasha (in office 30 June 1930 to 22 September 1933), landed



The Avro Company sent one of its Type 626 aeroplanes on a sales tour to Egypt in June and July 1932. Here Victor Hubert Tait with the Egyptian and British airmen who would operate the EAAF's first Avro 626 squadron stand in front of the machine which Mr. Tomkins demonstrated at Almaza. The most obvious difference between it and the 626s supplied to Egypt was that the latter had metal propellers. (V.H. Tait archive)



EAAF Avro 626s (serial numbers J306 and J309) in flight over England. They would be among the first batch of to be delivered to Egypt in 1933. (V.H. Tait archive)

at the RAF depot at Abu Qir, having flown from Cairo in one of the EAAF's Avro 'Tens' piloted by *Bimbashi* Jack Cottle. During this flight, he had been escorted by several of the EAAF's Gipsy Moths. It is interesting to note that the government led by Isma'il Sidqi would also be very supportive of the establishment of Egypt's first airline, Misr Airwork.

After a brief inspection of the facilities and a discussion with the RAF officer in command, Prime Minister Isma'il Sidqi Pasha and Cottle flew back to Cairo the following day. This should probably be recorded as the EAAF's first official mission, although its first public appearance after being formally established was on 15 December 1932, when the Gipsy Moths manoeuvred overhead while King Fu'ad drove from his palace to the parliament building to open a new session of the Egyptian parliament. One might have expected such a display to be celebrated in a poem by 'the Prince of Poets' Ahmad Shawqi, but sadly he had died on 14 October.

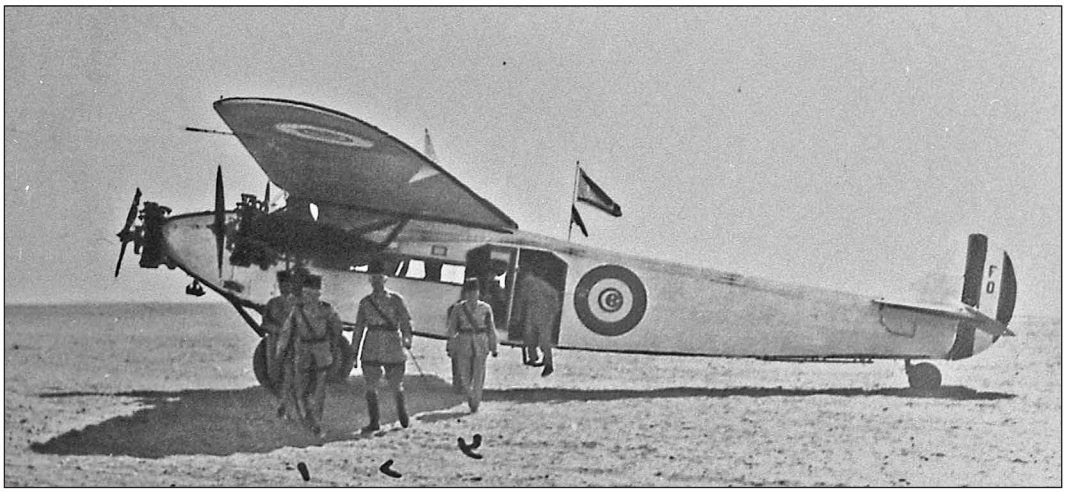
The Gipsy Moths formed what became No. 1 (Army Cooperation) Squadron, and most of the EAAF's time was taken up with very intensive training. It had also been thrown almost immediately into Egypt's 'war on drugs'. Russell Pasha, the Commander of the Cairo Police, is credited with the idea of using these new 'eyes in the sky' to help his men reduce the cultivation

of opium poppies in the Nile Valley. For *Qa'im-Maqam* Tait, such duties offered a golden opportunity for his young airmen to develop their skills in air observation while also proving themselves to be a useful addition to Egypt's very limited armoury. The large and beautiful opium poppy flowers were conspicuous from the air, with their grey-green plants being topped with a single pale mauve flower. The difference between a small patch of poppy and the surrounding, taller and notably darker green bean plants was obvious in almost all light conditions. It was almost certainly during training for this task that a flight of EAAF Moths flew to Upper Egypt, early in 1933, under the leadership of *Bimbashi* Cottle. They were met at Assyut by the commanding officer at Manqabad, the most important Egyptian Army garrison and training centre in Upper Egypt, and by the *Sub-Mudir* (assistant governor) of Assyut province.

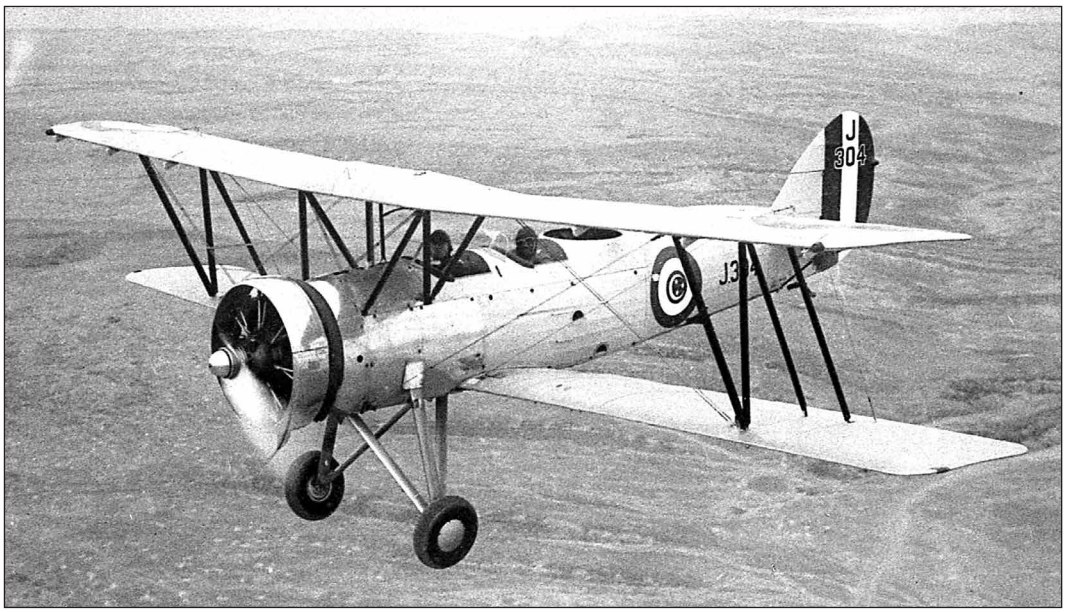
During their first year of operations, the crews of the Gipsy Moths located great numbers of patches of opium poppies, but the Moths as yet carried no cameras, so the locations had to be marked manually on maps. As a consequence, it was usually half a day later that a police patrol laboriously located the spot, destroyed the crop and prosecuted its owner. Nevertheless, the police soon found that, in areas which were likely to be overflown by aeroplanes, the poppy plants were often bent down with a handful of soil placed over the conspicuous flower heads, with the intention of letting them spring up again once the aerial danger passed.

With practice, the pilots and observers soon came up with an effective and indeed merciful system. When they found a poppy-patch, they would reduce altitude and

Four British RAF personnel on secondment to the EAAF in front of one of the Egyptian Avro 618s, with newly delivered Avro 626s on the right. (V.H. Tait archive)

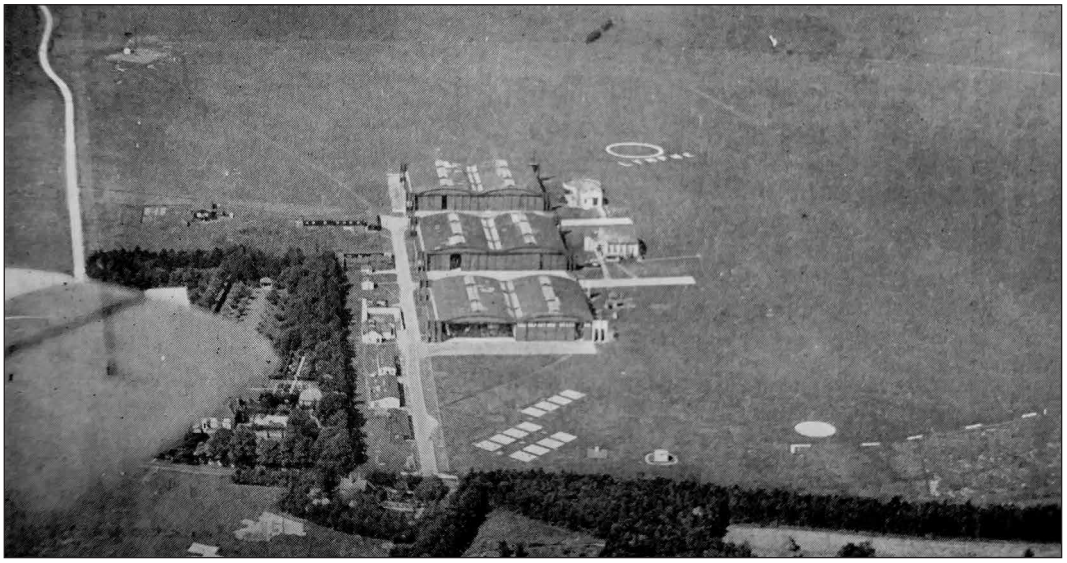


An EAAF Avro 618 with Spinks Pasha and other senior Egyptian officers on their way to Manqabad around 1933. (Egyptian Air Force Museum archive)



An EAAF Avro 626 (number J304) which was from first batch to be delivered, in flight over the desert. (V.H. Tait archive)

The first squadron of Avro 626s lined up at Lympne aerodrome before their delivery flight to Egypt. The crown which was added to the outer ring of the fuselage roundel is clearly visible. (V.H. Tait archive)



An aerial view of Lympne airfield, designated as the UK's Customs Aerodrome from which aeroplanes being exported to other countries had to pass. Unfortunately it was also located next to a marsh and often suffered from fog. (V.H. Tait archive)

circle over the field a few times to show the farmers that their illegal crop had been discovered. The Egyptian *fallahin* peasantry quickly recognised the signs and would summon their family and friends to tear up the valuable poppies before any police arrived. This not only got rid of the poppies, but avoided the cost and bother of prosecutions, while also saving the farmers from going to prison or paying substantial fines. It was, in fact, all very Egyptian.

Stopping drugs from being smuggled into the country was quite a different matter, though it was probably as a training exercise that five EAAF Moths (numbers E101-E105) first flew to Marsa Matruh, close to the Libyan frontier, at the start of June 1933. Herds of camels had long been brought to Egypt, usually to be slaughtered for meat, but as the price of drugs increased, hashish and other drugs was often hidden beneath the hair on the camels' humps. In earlier days, the route from Greece where the drugs were produced, by ship to Libya and then overland into Egypt from the west, had been favoured. However, as Italian control was brutally consolidated across Libya, and after Greece prohibited hashish cultivation in 1932, most smuggling stemmed from the Levant, across the Palestinian frontier into Egyptian Sinai.

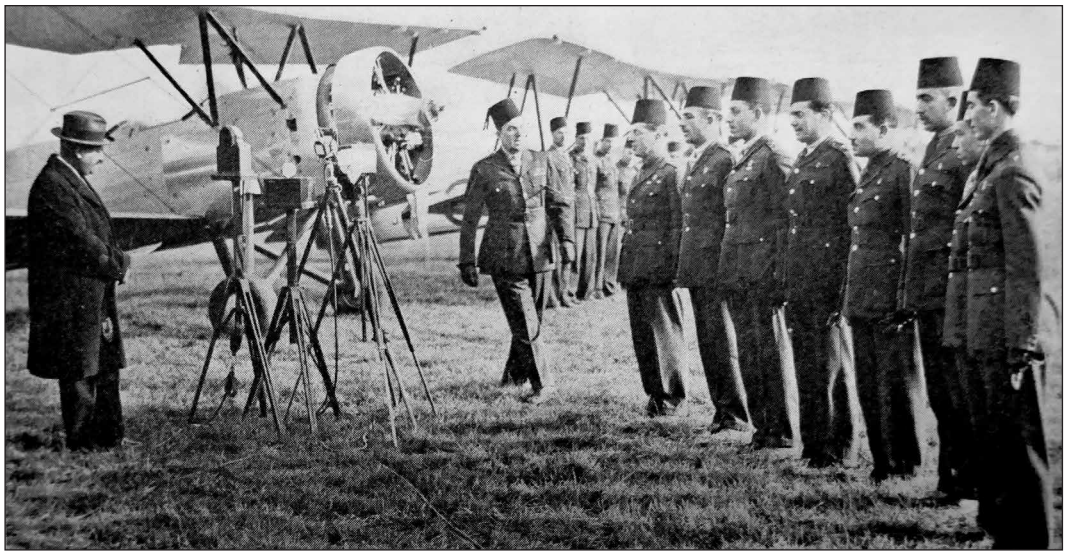
The boldest and toughest of these desert smugglers were the Bedouin of Sinai and the Libyan desert. They tended to shoot back if challenged by Egyptian Frontier Forces or the Coastguard. Indeed, the more-organised smuggling gangs were better armed than the forces of the law. The Sinai Bedouin were exceptionally tough tribesmen, most being camel and goat herders who spent their lives on the verge of starvation. Russell Pasha described them as "the poorest of God's creatures"; for a very small payment, many would try their luck by running smuggling caravans across the Sinai desert from Palestine to the Suez Canal.

After 1914, a new Egyptian Frontiers Administration had been formed as part of the Egyptian Ministry of Defence. Its task was to take over law enforcement in desert areas where the Egyptian Coastguard had previously been in charge. These men, mostly recruited from Bedouin tribes themselves, patrolled the eastern frontier from Rafah to Aqaba, being based in isolated outposts such as al-Qusaymah. When they found the tracks of men or animals crossing the frontier, a patrol was assembled and the information was telegraphed to other outposts.

More often than not, the smugglers had up to 10 hours' start and would march through the night to reach the shelter of the Sinai mountains, which lay some 30km from the Suez Canal, before dawn broke. They would hide there though the following day, while their animals grazed like those of ordinary Bedouin tribesmen. After darkness again fell, the smugglers made a dash for the Suez Canal and were met at the edge of the waterway by swimmers who took the drugs across, often to fishermen's boats waiting on the shore of Lake Manzalah.

Motorised transport had proved to be the only way for the Frontiers Administration to get on top of these smugglers. Now, however, the authorities could also call upon the new Egyptian Army Air Force. Even so, it became obvious that the EAAF needed something more potent than the little Gipsy Moths and the two lumbering Avro 'Tens'. Nevertheless, the Egyptians did achieve some notable successes.

For example, on 23 April 1933, a Frontier Force patrol found the tracks of some smugglers, two of whom were quickly caught. Other tracks were then found, so a full-scale search was organised using camels, cars and aeroplanes. On 25 April, three DH.60 Gipsy Moths were sent from Almaza to the airfield at al-Arish, close to the Palestine frontier. They were flown by *Bimbashi* S.J. Stocks, *Mulazim Awal* Haggag and *Mulazim Awal* Nagi. By flying low over the desert, they located the smugglers' tracks, but it was



Qa'im-Maqam Victor Hubert Tait giving his men a pep-talk on 14 November 1933, before they were addressed by Dr. Hafiz Afifi Pasha, the Egyptian ambassador to the UK who had the status of a Minister. They would soon depart for Paris on the first leg of their flight to Egypt. The pilots were Mulazim Awal M.A. Muna'im, A.H. Dighaydi, A.M. Miqaati and F.A.H. Haggag, Mulazim Thani A.H. Khalifa, A. Nagi and I. Hakki, plus Bimbashi S.N. Webster who, like Tait, was on secondment from the RAF. Lined up in front of the aeroplanes are an Egyptian wireless operator, three Egyptian NCOs and five British warrant officers, G.C.B. Smith, H. Dingwall, S.J. Oldland, H.L. Whitlock and A.L. Roberts. (V.H. Tait archive)

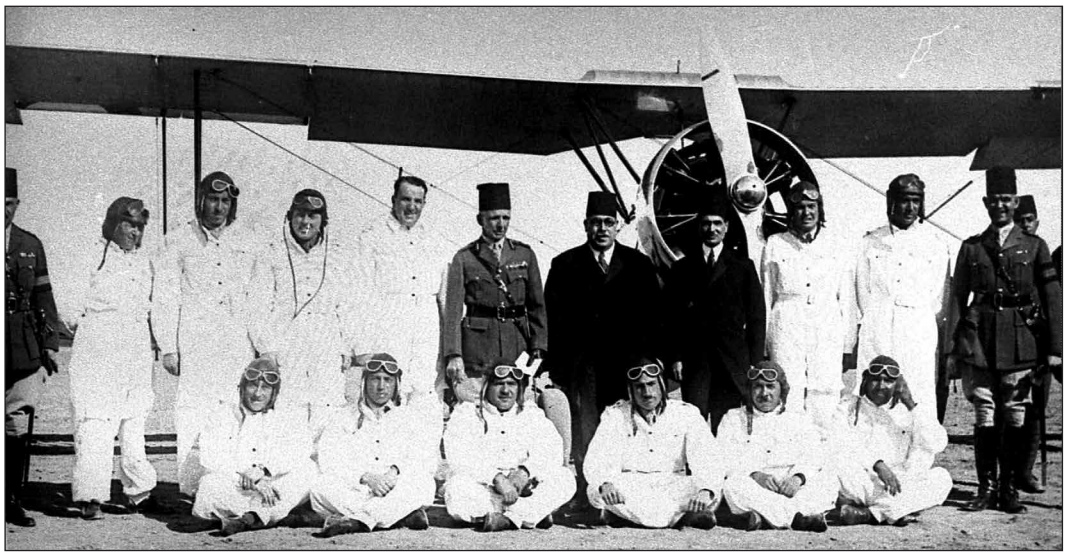
now too late in the day for aeroplanes to follow these tracks so they returned to al-Arish. At dawn next day, the machines were again in the air, located the smugglers, reported to the police and then returned to Cairo.

A few days later, in late April and early May, one of the Avro 'Tens' piloted by Stocks, with *Mulazim Awal* Raziq as second pilot, plus *Mulazim Thani* Dighaydi (who had not yet been sent for flying training at Abu Suwayr) and *Mulazim Awal* Miqaati as observers, arrived at al-Arish from Cairo. This larger aeroplane had wireless so that it could communicate with Frontier Force patrols on the ground. This task was Miqaati's speciality, and the crew managed to track a large band of smugglers to within 3km of the Suez Canal, at which point the smugglers fled, leaving their drugs to be seized by the Frontier Forces.

Such work pushed the capabilities of the little Gipsy Moths to their limit. These aircraft did have an additional hand-pumped fuel tank for long-distance desert work, but it was extremely tiring to use; a fact which probably lay behind a story that was told to the author by one of Egypt's later MiG fighter pilots, Abd al-Mona'im Tawil. He recalled how his beloved uncle, the early Egyptian Air Force pilot Muhammad Farag, told him that one of the early types of aeroplane was known as *Abu Manafikh* ('Father of Bellows' or 'Father of Handpumps'). Abd al-Mona'im Tawil thought that his uncle was referring to the Avro 626, which had a tendency to suffer from engine fires which then had to be extinguished using a hand-pump, but it seems more likely that Muhammad Farag was talking of the old DH.60 Gipsy Moth.

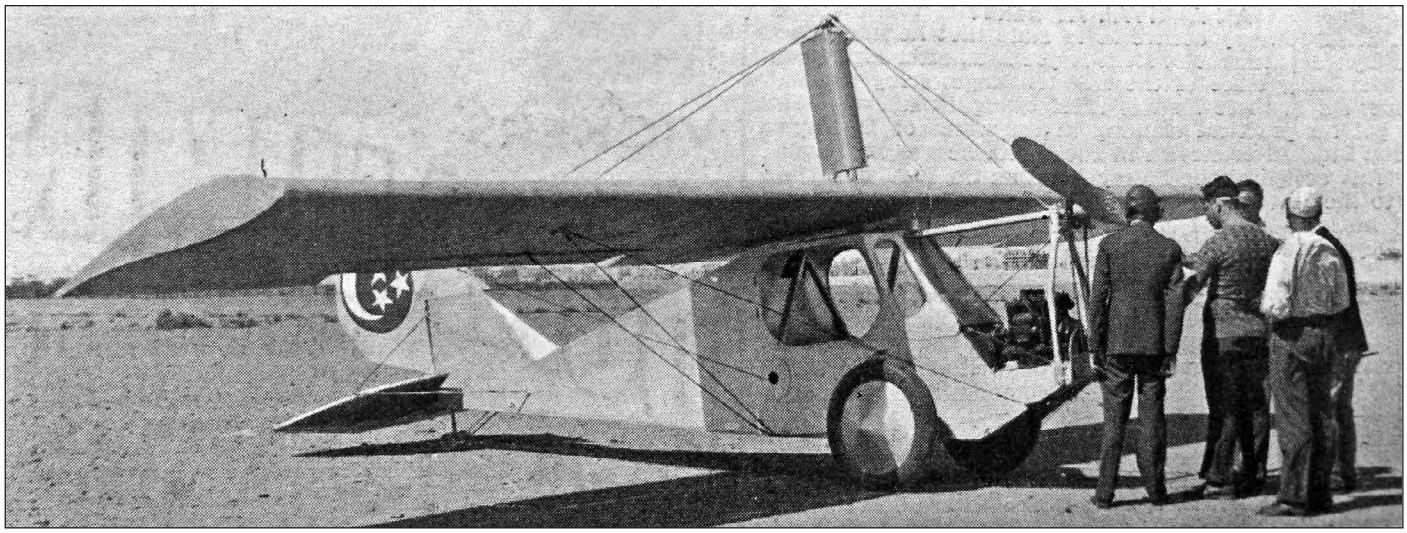
In July 1933, another significant technical improvement for the Egyptian Frontier Forces was the fitting of special balloon tyres to their vehicles so that they did not so readily bog down in loose sand. These proved successful, and similar balloon tyres were soon fitted to some of the EAAF's aeroplanes. Perhaps as a result, according to a report dated 17 July that year, the Egyptian Frontier Forces captured one of the biggest ever hashish-running caravans in Sinai. At almost the same time, the Egyptian government announced that money had been allocated to buy 10 new Avro aeroplanes to be used for advanced training, army cooperation, aerial surveying and the ongoing struggle against drug smugglers.

The type in question was the Avro 626. One of these versatile machines had earlier been sent to the Middle East on a sales tour, when Avro's pilot, a Mr Tomkins, demonstrated it at Almaza during late June or early July 1932. The type 626 was a version of the successful Avro 621 Tutor training aeroplane, redesigned specially for foreign air forces which were short of money but required a sturdy, multi-purpose aircraft. As a result, the Avro 626 could undertake *ab initio* flying training, navigational blind flying, gunnery, bombing, aerial photography and wireless communication. The 626 could even be converted into a seaplane. Though essentially a two-seater, with a pilot and observer-gunner, the 626 actually had three crew positions.



The surviving aircrew who flew the first Avro 626s to Egypt, after their arrival Cairo and still wearing flying overalls. In the centre is Spinks Pasha, the Inspector General of the Egyptian Army and two Egyptian government officials. On the far left and right two other Egyptian officers wear dark armbands, probably in mourning for Fu'ad Haggag and Shuhdi Duss who had been killed on the first leg of the journey. (V.H. Tait archive)

Egypt was one of 14 countries, including the Kwangsi (Guangxi) Provisional Government of south China (an autonomous 'war lord' administration also known as the New Guangxi Clique), which purchased the 626.



An otherwise unknown form of ultra-light aircraft was built in Egypt in 1933, and photographed at Almaza aerodrome. Powered by a four-cylinder Henderson motorcycle engine, it reflected a "flying flea" craze which was characteristic of the inter-war years. Whether the machine ever flew seems to be unknown.

However, the first 10 Egyptian machines were an improved version with a powerful Armstrong Siddeley Cheetah V 260hp engine. This resulted in less range than the standard Lynx IV C engine, but offered greater speed and climb, as well as a higher ceiling.

The Egyptian pilots of the EAAF were young and still inexperienced, so training as well as technical and organisational advice remained in the hands of attached British and British Imperial officers, NCOs and civilian instructors. *Qa'im-Maqam* Tait remained keen that all the Egyptian personnel did plenty of physical exercise – he was, in truth, something of a fanatic in such matters. On the other hand, educated Egyptian society traditionally looked down upon strenuous physical exertion as being characteristic of *fallahin* peasants rather than the sophisticated or Westernised *effendi* class. As a result, the EAAF and the REAF which it later became won virtually all Egyptian military sporting competitions.

Furthermore, Tait had the pick of cadets from the Egyptian Army Military School because a majority of them volunteered for the Air Force. The EAAF not only had great prestige but was also paid more than the rest of the Egyptian Army. Egyptian officers of this time mostly still came from just below the Pasha class and might best be described as 'mixed origin *bourgeoisie*'. Some were 'Egyptian Egyptian', claiming descent from the country's ancient inhabitants, while others were Arab Egyptian, Circassian Egyptian, Turkish Egyptian or Balkan (Albanian or Bosnian) Egyptian. Meanwhile, the EAAF had generally excellent relations with the RAF, though there were still many in the latter who considered the EAAF something of a joke and continued to sneer at its personnel as 'wogs'. It would take decades for such racist prejudice to disappear, if it ever did.

During 1932, another small group of Egyptian officers was learning to fly at the RAF's No. 4 FTS close to the Suez Canal. *Mulazim* (First Lieutenant) Salih Mahmud Salih earned his wings in December 1932, closely followed by *Mulazim Thani* Ibrahim Hassan Gazerine (Jazarin), who had been commissioned upon graduating from the Egyptian Army Military School in 1932. Another extremely capable man who joined the EAAF around this time was Yusuf Wasif. A Christian Coptic Egyptian, he was initially Tait's civilian clerk but was also eager to go on a course in England. Yusuf Wasif pestered Tait to such an extent that the latter – who made it clear in his interview with the author that he really liked Wasif – eventually sent him on a wireless course at the Marconi Company. Subsequently, Yusuf Wasif managed to get a commission in the Royal Egyptian Air Force and rose to the rank of *Qa'id Liwa* (Group Captain) before retiring to become the UAA (United Arab Airways) supplies officer in London. UAA was, of course, the name given to Misr Air (Egyptian Airways) during the period of President Nasser's United Arab Republic.

In 1933, some or all of the EAAF's DH.60 Gipsy Moths were fitted with equipment to distribute DDT (dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane, a now highly restricted insecticide) as part of a nationwide campaign against the malaria-carrying mosquito. They and their crews were also called upon to undertake aerial photography to record archaeological sites that were in danger of disappearing beneath Egypt's expanding agricultural area (as a result of extended irrigation) and fast-growing towns. A photographic mosaic which could be seen for many decades inside the front door of Cairo's famous National Archaeological Museum was made by these EAAF Gipsy Moths and Avro 626s. Such aerial survey work for the Department of Antiquities earned the new force a special commendation from King Fu'ad, who had a particular interest in antiquities as well as in aviation.

Eventually, the Egyptian government purchased a total of 32 Avro 626s (c.n. 668-677, 680, 695, 793, an unknown c.n. which became J320, c.n. 761-770, 799 and 942), which were given Egyptian serial numbers J300-J332. The first batch were handed over in July 1933, but sadly soon resulted in the EAAF's first fatalities. On 27 October that year, *Qa'im-Maqam* Tait and Dr Hafiz Afifi Pasha, the Egyptian ambassador in London, inspected the newly built Avros on the company's aerodrome at Woodford near Manchester. According to a report published in London five days earlier, a party of 18 EAAF officers and NCOs had arrived at Lympne aerodrome near Hythe in Kent. They would have a three-week training course prior to flying their new Avro 626s back to Egypt. These men were led by Tait, while Webster, the EAAF's chief instructor, would supervise their training.

According to *The Aeroplane* magazine of 11 November 1933, the "Best aviation news film of the past week" was taken by a cameraman who had gone up in one of the Egyptian Avro 626s to film the others in flight over southern England. When interviewed by the author, Tait recalled both the amusing and the tragic aspects of this episode. After the Egyptian government purchased their

first batch of Avro 626s, he had gone to the Royal Aero Club in London and "casually" announced at the bar that he was searching for insurance to cover both the Egyptians' training in England and their flight back to Egypt. The British Aviation Insurance Company, only established on 24 February 1930, offered what Tait required.

In the event, this contract would provide the British Aviation Insurance Company with what Tait described as "plenty of experience". It started during the last phase of the training programme at Lympne, where the Egyptians faced English fog. Fog is a common phenomenon in Egypt, but the young pilots had not yet been expected to fly in it. Miqaati lost his bearings while landing in foggy conditions on 13 November and made what was described as "a good three-point landing" in a nearby marsh. He struck a drainage ditch and smashed one of the Avros. Another machine had been slightly damaged when it ran into a hedge, but on neither occasion were the Egyptian pilots hurt. Dr Afifi arrived in Lympne the following day for an inspection, but just eight aeroplanes were now available to make a flypast, the only British pilot on this occasion being *Bimbashi* Webster. The two damaged machines were nevertheless promptly replaced, and within a few days the new squadron was ready to fly to Egypt.

The flight to Cairo was to be led by Tait and Webster, accompanied by seven Egyptian officers: *Mulazim Awal* M.A. Muna'im, A.H. Dighaydi, A.M. Miqaati and F.A.H. Haggag, and *Mulazim Thani* A.H. Khalifa, A. Nagi and I. Hakki. One unnamed Egyptian wireless operator, five British warrant officers – G.C.B. Smith, H. Dingwall, S.J. Oldland, H.L. Whitlock and A.L. Roberts – and three Egyptian NCOs formed the rest of the aircrews. The names of the Egyptian NCOs are unrecorded, apart from that of the unfortunate Shuhdi Duss. According to some accounts, one or more of the junior Egyptian officers, including Abd al-Halim Khalifa, had yet to be awarded their wings and so travelled in the observers' seats.

The squadron of 10 Avro 626s left Lympne early in the morning of 18 November, but only seven would reach the French Air Force aerodrome of Le Bourget outside Paris. One got separated and the unspecified pilot, uncertain of his whereabouts, landed safely at the French military aerodrome of Villacoublay south-west of Paris. A second flown by the British crew of Dingwall and Smith suffered a misfiring engine and had to make an emergency landing at Wisnes au Val, south of Abbeville. The aeroplane was badly damaged but the pilot and observer were unhurt.

The crew of a third Avro 626 were not so fortunate. It is thought that the pilot, Fu'ad Haggag, also had engine trouble and tried to make an emergency landing in thick fog near Blangy-sur-Bresle in northern Normandy. The aircraft either hit a high-tension electricity cable or the pilot, seeing this cable at the last moment, tried to fly beneath it. The aeroplane hit the ground, overturned in a deep hole and caught fire. Both Haggag and his observer-mechanic, Shuhdi Duss, were killed. Haggag was the first of 21 Egyptian Air Force officers to be killed between 1933 and 1946.

Meanwhile, Tait had decided not to press on from Paris until the weather improved. Upon receiving news of the tragedy, he and Webster went to Blangy to collect the bodies and take them to Cairo. Tait remembered the Egyptian ambassador in France as being kind and helpful when arranging the funerals, but whereas the ambassador attended the religious services on 29 November, the Canadian Tait and British Webster were not keen on the traditionally high emotions of Egyptian funerals. Instead, they went to one of Cairo's nightclubs to drown their sorrows.

While there, Tait happened to meet a man named Lamplow, who was a leading light in aviation insurance. Lamplow asked Tait to keep the EAAF insured with the British Aviation Insurance Company, which it did for many years, and, after this bad start, the company made a substantial profit. There was now a war of words between elements of the Egyptian press – which used the tragedy to cast doubts on the quality of British aeroplanes – and the patriotic British magazine *The Aeroplane*, which rose in indignant defence of British aviation.

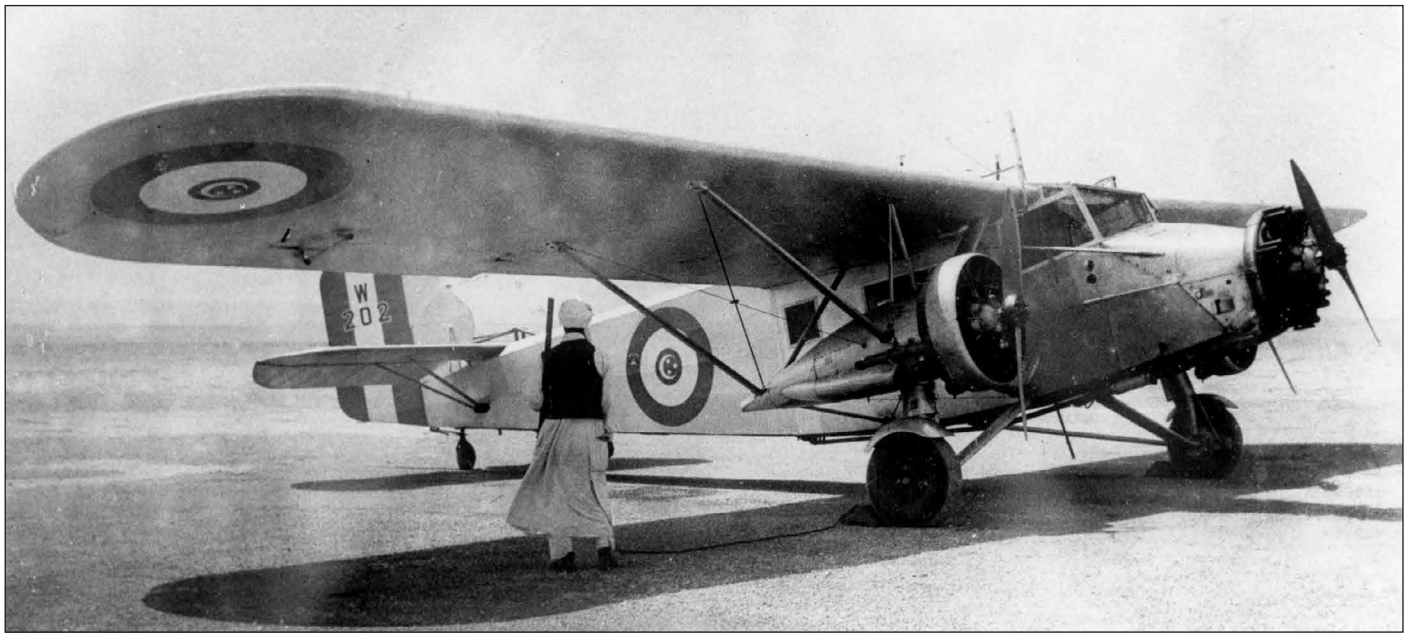
The funerals of Haggag and Duss took place in Cairo on a dull and overcast day, the coffins, mounted on gun carriages, leaving Cairo's main railway station at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. They were accompanied by a large crowd, largely consisting of Egyptian students and schoolboys. Although Tait did not mention this in his interview with the author, he probably anticipated the almost inevitable political demonstrations. By the time the procession reached Cairo's Opera Square, there was noisy shouting in favour of the Egyptian opposition leader, Nahas Pasha of the Wafd Party, who had attended the funerals, and against the current Prime Minister, Abd al-Fattah Yahya Pasha of the Ittihad 'Union' Party (in office from 22 September 1933 to 15 November 1934), who was widely regarded as the king's stooge. Furthermore, his government was also believed by many to be hostile to Misr Airwork.

The Cairo Police managed to control the situation, though with difficulty, with order only restored after Nahas Pasha left the scene. The procession then continued, accompanied by mounted police, Egyptian infantry with arms reversed, an Egyptian Army band and about 100 Army and EAAF officers, including most of the country's senior military men. The coffins themselves were escorted by EAAF aircraftsmen. Many of the students, reportedly from every college and school in Cairo, now seemed to have calmed down. They followed behind, many carrying wreaths, some of which were in the shape of aeroplanes, while others carried photographs of the dead men.

On 7 December 1933, the eight undamaged Avro 626s, which had by now reached Egypt safely, flew over Cairo in formations of five and three, before landing at Almaza, where they were greeted by a huge crowd. The six Egyptian officers, plus Tait and Webster, the Egyptian radio operator, two Egyptian NCOs and five British warrant officers were then presented to King Fu'ad and most of the ministers in his government. Later that afternoon, the men went to pay their respects at the graves of their comrades, Haggag and Duss.

Coincidentally, during the same year that the EAAF took possession of what might be regarded as its first truly military aircraft, Egyptian civil aviation took a notable step forward when the country's first female pilot obtained her flying licence on 27 September. This was the young Luftia al-Nadi. She had been born in Cairo in 1907 and rapidly became a celebrity. Luftia al-Nadi was also recruited as Prince Abbas Halim's assistant in his efforts to promote aviation in Egypt, becoming Chief Secretary of the Egyptian Aero Club.

Luftia al-Nadi is regarded as the first female Arab or African pilot and was also only the 34th Egyptian of either gender to qualify as a pilot. Lutfia never married, having dedicated her life to flying, and during the Palestine War of 1948-49 she played a major role in maintaining the morale of Egyptian aircrews by arranging entertainment for the young men when they returned to Cairo on leave from the front. After being injured in a flying accident in the 1950s, Lutfia travelled to Switzerland for medical treatment and



In March 1934 the Egyptian Air Force acquired a Westland Wessex (c.n. WA2152A, ex-British civilian registration G-ACIJ) to replace the Avro 618 which had been written off at Assyut during the Circuit of the Oases Rally of 1933. It was given the serial number W202. (I. Blair archive)

lived there for some years while also obtaining Swiss citizenship. In her 80s, Lutfia moved to Toronto to live with her nephew, a prominent interior designer, before returning to Cairo, the city of her birth, where she died in 2002 at the age of 95.

Also in 1933, an unnamed Egyptian engineer and aviation enthusiast built what would now be called an ultra-light aeroplane, clearly inspired by the 'flying flea' craze which characterised the inter-war years. This tiny single-seater machine appears to have been a locally developed version of the Dormoy Bathtub which had been designed and manufactured in the USA in 1924 by a Frenchman, Etienne Dormoy. Just over 7 metres long and weighing a little over 172kg, the first Bathtub could fly for 80km on 4.5 litres of fuel. On Dormoy's first trial flight in 1924, he reached an altitude of over 750 metres in this tiny aeroplane, and later that year won the prestigious Rickenbacker race for light planes.

In 1925, another version of Dormoy's machine appeared which had a covered tail-section, as did the Egyptian ultra-light which was still powered by the usual four-cylinder Heath-Henderson B-4 aero-engine. This had in turn been developed from the Henderson motorcycle engine, though here the engine drove the propeller via a chain. The ultra-light's fuel tank also formed part of the support for the top wing bracing. Unfortunately, nothing else seems to be known about this silver-doped little flying machine, which, with its two oversized wheels and tail bearing the green and white Egyptian flag, was photographed at Almaza aerodrome. While modernisers in Egypt saw this event as symbolising their country's entry into the 20th century technological world, *The Aeroplane* aviation magazine also described the little aeroplane with interest.

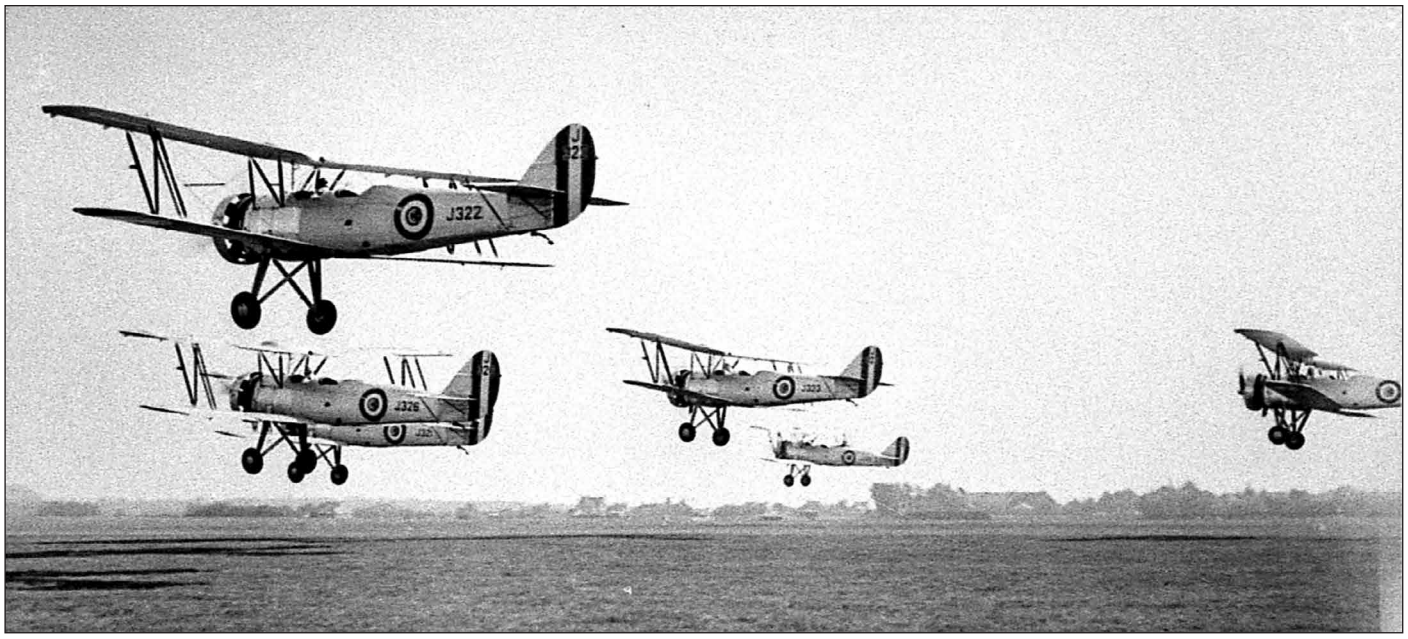
Only five days after arriving in Egypt, four of the Avro 626s helped shepherd the numerous participants in the Circuit of the Oases Air Rally across the Egyptian desert. Maps for this event had also been prepared by the EAAF, along with the Egyptian Aero Club, Misr Airwork and the Shell Oil Company. At the time, Misr Airwork already operated a flying school at Almaza, where the staff included Mr A.D. Carroll as chief instructor, with Mr E.G. Parsons and Kashif Effendi, a local Egyptian pilot, as assistant instructors. The Circuit of the Oases Air Rally was an ambitious affair in which participants flew from the EAAF's new and rudimentary airfield outside Assyut in the Nile Valley to the oases of Kharga, Dakhla, Farafra and Bahariya, where the EAAF already had rough landing grounds.

During preparations for the rally, the EAAF lost another aeroplane, one of the Avro 618 'Tens' (serial number F200). *Bimbashi* Stocks was taking off from Assyut with seven passengers on board when one of his three engines cut out at an altitude of about 35 metres. This was rapidly followed by the other two engines failing before Stocks could turn back to the airfield. Stocks followed correct procedure and made an emergency landing directly ahead, but, unable to reach flat ground, came down in a rough area. The Avro 'Ten' was badly damaged and one person on board was slightly injured.

According to a different account of this incident, Stocks started to turn back while he still had two engines, but then landed ahead when these also failed. Some anti-British newspapers accused him of the basic error of trying to turn with a failing engine, but this rule did not apply to a tri-motor machine when it still had power in two engines. Once again, *The Aeroplane* rose in almost hysterical defence of a British pilot, clearly unable to accept criticism from Egyptians. The entire affair was deeply unpleasant, but also characteristic of its time.

Another responsibility which fell to the EAAF's aeroplanes was to locate any machine that came down in the desert and drop emergency supplies to its crew. One pilot who had to make such an emergency landing was Muhammad Hasik, whose Comper C.L.A.7 Swift (c.n. S30/5 or S30/6, ex-G-AAZD, now registered as SU-AAJ) came down on a rocky escarpment between Kharga and Dakhla. Hasik had only acquired the Swift the previous month, and although *Bimbashi* Webster quickly located the missing aeroplane, he had considerable difficulty in landing nearby in one of the EAAF's aircraft. He managed to do so, however, and flew Hasik to safety because the Swift had been damaged. This machine was eventually returned to England in 1935, where it regained the British registration G-AAZD.

Tait recalled a more amusing incident during the Circuit of the Oases Air Rally. It happened at the airfield outside Kharga oasis when a polite and chatty individual was standing next to



Considerable publicity was given to the departure of the second batch of EAAF Avro 626s from Lympne bound for Cairo, including a low-level formation flypast before they set off on the first leg to Paris. (V.H. Tait archive)

The second delivery flight of Avro 626s followed much the same flight path as the first. Here Victor Hubert Tait adjusts his flying suit, either in Italy or Italian-ruled Libya, watched by a Regia Aeronautica *Sottotenente* (Second Lieutenant). (Egyptian Air Force Museum archive)

himself and Webster as they watched an aeroplane landing. This talkative person asked Webster whether he had seen any of the Schneider Trophy races. Webster had, of course, won that race in 1927, and according to Tait, Webster's reply was lost in the noise of aero engines. The first aeroplane to complete the course was a de Havilland Moth piloted by Mademoiselle Lutfia al-Nadi, accompanied by Misr Airwork's chief instructor, A.D. Carroll.

The EAAF's duties during 1934 were more mundane, with the first batch of Avro 626s mostly being used on what became daily anti-smuggling patrols over Sinai in support of the Frontiers and Coastguard Forces. Others were flown along the Mediterranean coast for the same reason. Some aeroplanes were also used to survey the extent of the annual Nile flood, which was higher than it had been for half a century.

Meanwhile, increasing numbers of new aircrew were being recruited and trained. There appears to have been more than one training course this year, with two or perhaps three groups of three cadets being sent to the RAF's No. 4 FTS at Abu Suwayr between late 1933 and late 1934. Here, RAF instructors, like those RAF men already attached to the EAAF, found that their Egyptian pupils tended to be above average in flying ability and very keen to get into the air. Unfortunately, this was sometimes at the expense of other skills. According to the RAF, there was, for example, a lack of decisiveness when faced by unexpected problems. Another problem was the young fliers' lack of enthusiasm for mundane subjects such as navigation and radio. Furthermore, there was a tendency to regard the aeroplanes as being entirely the concern of mechanics and others who got their hands dirty, rather than of those who actually flew them. All the pilots were still only of junior rank, as it took up to 25 years to reach the rank of *Bimbashi* (Lieutenant Colonel) in the Egyptian Army. Consequently, the senior Egyptian officers dealing with EAAF affairs remained 'Army men', who rarely had deep knowledge of flying and its associated problems.

The new EAAF pilots currently being trained by the RAF at Abu Suwayr included men who would play a prominent role in the subsequent history of what became the REAF. They included Hassan Tawfiq, Mahmud Sidqi Mahmud al-Milaigy, Abd al-Halim Khalifa, Hassan Mahmud, Ibrahim Hakki, Abd al-Hamid al-Dighaydi and possibly Hasan Aqif. Some of those in the final batch of 1935 pupils would not, of course, complete their training until 1936, one of them being Hassan Mahmud.

Another who went to No. 4 FTS at Abu Suwayr in late 1933, and graduated in 1934, was Ibrahim Hakki. Described as a level-

In addition to locating the cultivation of illegal drugs along the banks of the Nile, the EAAF was promptly thrown into the battle against drug smuggling across the country's desert frontiers. Most such work focussed upon the Sinai Peninsula, where the exceptionally dusty airfields put great strain on machines, mechanics and aircrew. (Egyptian Air Force Museum archive)

An Egyptian Avro 626, number J301, following a crash. This may have been in Sinai when newly qualified Hassan Mahmud and an unnamed pilot were looking for drug smugglers. As both studied the ground beneath them, their Avro stalled. The pilot was fatally injured but Mahmud survived. (V.H. Tait archive)

headed and skilled man, he later served as a navigational instructor when Egypt's own Flying Training School was established at Almaza. He then rose to command this training establishment during the darkest days of the Second World War. Subsequently, Ibrahim Hakki became one of King Faruq's personal pilots, but, having got too close to the throne, felt obliged to leave the country after the Egyptian Revolution of 1952. Despite what was probably a voluntary exile, Hakki played an important role in negotiations which resulted in Egypt purchasing de Havilland Comets, the world's first jet airliners, for United Arab Airlines. At the time of the author's interview with Victor Tait in the mid-1970s, Ibrahim Hakki was reportedly living in Brighton on the south coast of England, where he supplemented his income through an exceptional skill at cards, especially bridge.

Another man who graduated in 1934 was Abd al-Halim Khalifa, who had taken part in the tragic first delivery flight of Avro 626s in late 1933, though only as a passenger in the observer's seat. Tait described Khalifa as "a rather wild type", and even his Egyptian colleagues regarded Khalifa as *majnun* ('crazy'). He was frequently in trouble with his superiors and was undoubtedly irresponsible. Tait recalled that on one occasion a mechanic noticed one of the aeroplanes had a slightly bent propeller, but none of the pilots had reported an accident. Later, a local Egyptian friend told Tait that he had seen an EAAF aeroplane in a field neighbouring his own farm and had also seen Abd al-Halim Khalifa. The young pilot had been joyriding and had flown to see a 'lady friend'.

Then there was Abd al-Hamid al-Dighaydi, who, after gaining his wings at Abu Suwayr, was sent to the RAF's Central Flying School, which had returned to Upavon in Wiltshire in August 1935. Here, Dighaydi was trained as a flying instructor but, according to Tait, having been passed by the final RAF assessment at Grade A1, the entire experience seems to have gone to Dighaydi's head. He wanted to become head of the Egyptian Air Force and let everyone know it. After a number of instances of bad behaviour, Tait felt it necessary to send the young pilot back to the infantry as a punishment. Furthermore, Dighaydi was then posted to Aswan in the deep of Egypt, which was considered a punishment posting. Dighaydi was nevertheless permitted to return to the Egyptian Air Force in 1936, though against Tait's advice.

Hasan Aqif was of Turkish origin and came to be regarded as strongly anti-British. He would also become one of King Faruq's personal pilots and an aide-de-camp. As such he was one of the few Egyptian Air Force officers whom Colonel Nasser and his colleagues specifically insisted must be exiled following the 1952 revolution. In later years, however, Aqif is said to have made peace with the Egyptian government and returned home.

Salih Mahmud Salih may have trained and qualified at No. 4 FTS in the Canal Zone in the same group as Aqif but was a very different character. Indeed, the British – correctly or incorrectly – regarded Salih as almost pro-British, or at least being sympathetic during and for some time after the Second World War.

EAAF Avro 626 from the second batch to be delivered, in formation over rugged mountains, probably in western Sinai. (Egyptian Air Force Museum archive)

The next group of EAAF junior officers to be sent to the RAF's No. 4 FTS did so immediately after graduating from the Egyptian Army School. They included Ibrahim Hasan Gazerine, Muhammad Farag and Muhammad Ibrahim Abu Rabia. They were thus the first newly commissioned Egyptian officers to go straight into the EAAF without spending three years at the Egyptian Military College. They were also the only non-RAF students at Abu Suwayr at that time. Here, as Gazerine recalled to the author, they trained on a variety of machines, including the ancient Avro 504N and the Armstrong Whitworth Atlas, which they regarded as a dangerous aeroplane to fly.

Gazerine's Flight Commander at Abu Suwayr was Thomas Geoffrey Pike, who, later in his career as Marshal of the RAF Sir Thomas Pike, was Chief of the British Air Staff during the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962. Pike had only joined No. 4 FTS as a flying instructor in November 1934. Although the normally good and generally predictable weather of Egypt made it very suitable for *ab initio* training, a motto hanging in the mess at No. 4 FTS proclaimed that it was 'Better to be Mr Late Pilot than Late Mr Pilot'. Abu Rabia earned his wings at No. 4 FTS at Abu Sueir, where he passed out with 'exceptional credit' as a pilot. He would subsequently command the REAF's first proper fighter squadron flying Gloster Gladiators, and later played a major role as a senior staff officer at al-Arish during the Palestine War of 1948.

Meanwhile, a smaller number of EAAF officers were sent on more advanced, specialist courses in the United Kingdom. They included one of Egypt's first military pilots, *Mulazim Awal* Ahmad Ibrahim Abd al-Raziq, who attended a two-year Engineering Specialist course at RAF Henlow in Bedfordshire. Back in Egypt, several EAAF pilots had logged over 700 hours flying time by the end of 1934, and some had proved to be especially skilled in formation flying. In addition to their usual work of anti-smuggling patrols and aerial survey, they continued taking aerial photographs for various Egyptian government departments.

Finding and training suitable groundcrews in sufficient numbers was more difficult. The upper echelons of Egyptian society were generally well educated, though almost entirely in the arts rather than the sciences, while the mass of rural *fallahin* or peasantry were overwhelmingly illiterate. In between, the Egyptian urban middle class was relatively small in number and its education tended not to produce young men who could absorb technical training immediately after leaving school. This remained a problem that it took Egypt decades to overcome.

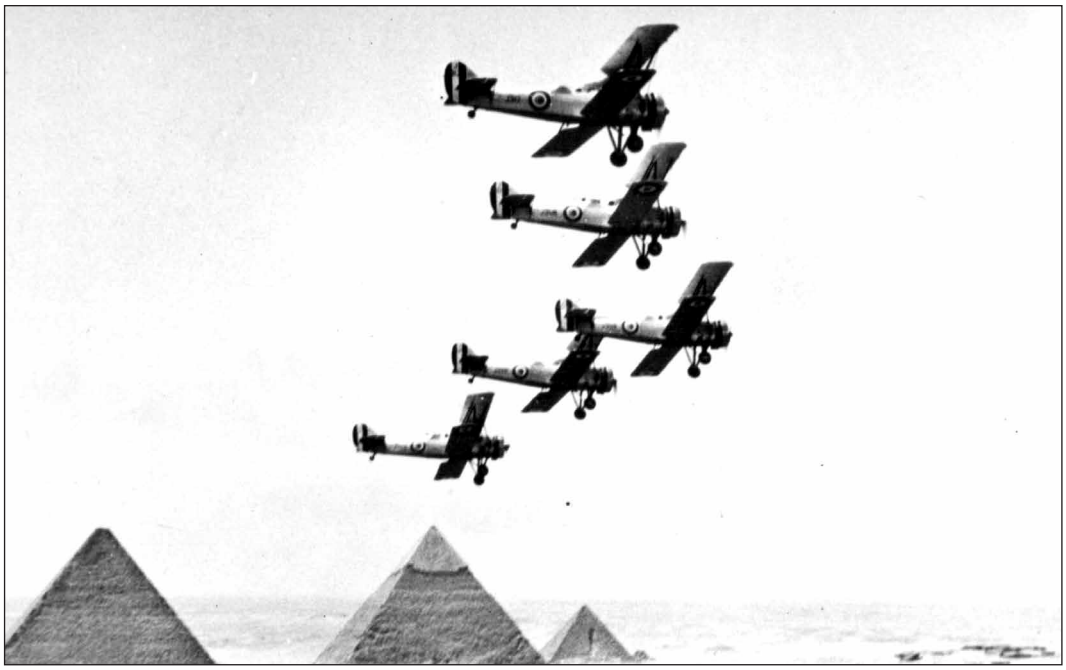
In March 1934, a three-engined Westland IV Wessex transport aeroplane took off from Heston in west London flown by an unnamed EAAF pilot and headed for Egypt. There it would replace the Avro 'Ten' that had been written off at Assyut during the Circuit of the Oases Rally. Described as "landing like a cushion", it was the last of this type to be built (c.n. WA2152A; ex-British civilian registration G-ACIJ) and would be given the EAAF serial number W202. Six months later, the EAAF's surviving Avro 618 'Ten' (serial number F201) was sold to Indian National Airways, where it became VT-AFX.

In June 1934, Tait travelled to Britain to purchase another 10 Avro 626s, the new Egyptian Air Ministry having allocated £71,000 for this purpose. In the meantime, Egypt had ordered two replacement machines for those lost during the first delivery flight. Somewhat confusingly, the serial numbers of the EAAF's Avro 626s therefore ran from J300-F312 after a third replacement machine brought the total of the first batch to 13, while the second batch was given serial numbers J320-J329, plus further replacements numbered J330 and J331.

On 14 September, it was reported that the second batch had been taken to Lympne on England's south coast, where a party of EAAF officers and NCOs were again inspected by the new Egyptian ambassador in London, His Excellency Hakki Bey. However, these aeroplanes were not fitted with gun mountings, nor with bomb racks, but were instead intended for reconnaissance and photographic work. For this reason, they could carry new Williamson F28 cameras, the same type used by RAF Reserve squadrons, because one of their priority tasks was to make a full aerial survey of Upper Egypt. Meanwhile, they were expected

to contribute to the EAAF's ongoing anti-smuggling patrols.

The new squadron of Avro 616s took off from Lympne on 17 September 1934 in two separate formations, each of five aeroplanes. It would be one of the most intensively photographed flights in the history of the Egyptian Air Force, as all the authorities involved had agreed that the EAAF and its British suppliers would benefit from publicity. The two groups were led by *Qa'im-Maqam* Tait and *Bimbashi* Webster. They were crewed by nine Egyptian officers, four British warrant officers and five Egyptian other ranks. As had happened during an earlier delivery flight, one of the junior EAAF officers had to sit in the observer's seat because he was not yet fully qualified as a pilot. This time it was the young *Muzazim Thani* Mahmud Sidqi al-Milaygi, and, like Abd al-Halim Khalifa, he felt deeply unhappy about it.



Flying in imitation of the lost-established British tradition of photographing RAF aeroplanes over the Pyramids of Giza, the EAAF's Avro 626s were similarly shown in formation over the Pyramids. (Albert Grandolini collection)

After a two-day stop in Paris and a visit to the site of Haggag's fatal crash at Blangy-sur-Bresle, they set off once again for Egypt. Before getting there, however, the men of the EAAF had their first official contact with their opposite numbers in Italy's Regia Aeronautica, enjoying the latter's lavish hospitality at an air base outside Rome. The Egyptians eventually reached Cairo on 1 October.

In Egypt, three political forces were competing with each other, as they had been for at least a decade: the Royal Palace, the Wafd Party and the British Embassy. The political atmosphere remained tense, with occasional violent street demonstrations. Although both the Palace and the Wafd wanted real and complete independence for their country, they disagreed on a great range of other matters. Consequently, as the Wafd worked to reduce royal power, the Palace strove to prevent the Wafd from forming a government which could carry out the party's undeniably popular programme.

However, these tensions occasionally verged on farce, as when the Egyptian Minister of Aviation, as chairman of an International Congress on Aviation held in Cairo in 1934, was criticised for making his opening speech in French rather than Arabic. Amongst much of Egypt's educated elite, there was a strong desire to make their country's indigenous language suitable as part of their wish to 'conquer technology'. Meanwhile, the royal family was itself split along cultural and even political lines, with the aviation enthusiast and supposedly 'revolutionary' Prince Abbas Halim increasing his efforts to organise the Egyptian working class. As a result, the prince found himself imprisoned in 1934, and while locked up continued to protest by going on hunger strike, prompting widespread worker protests and demands for his release.

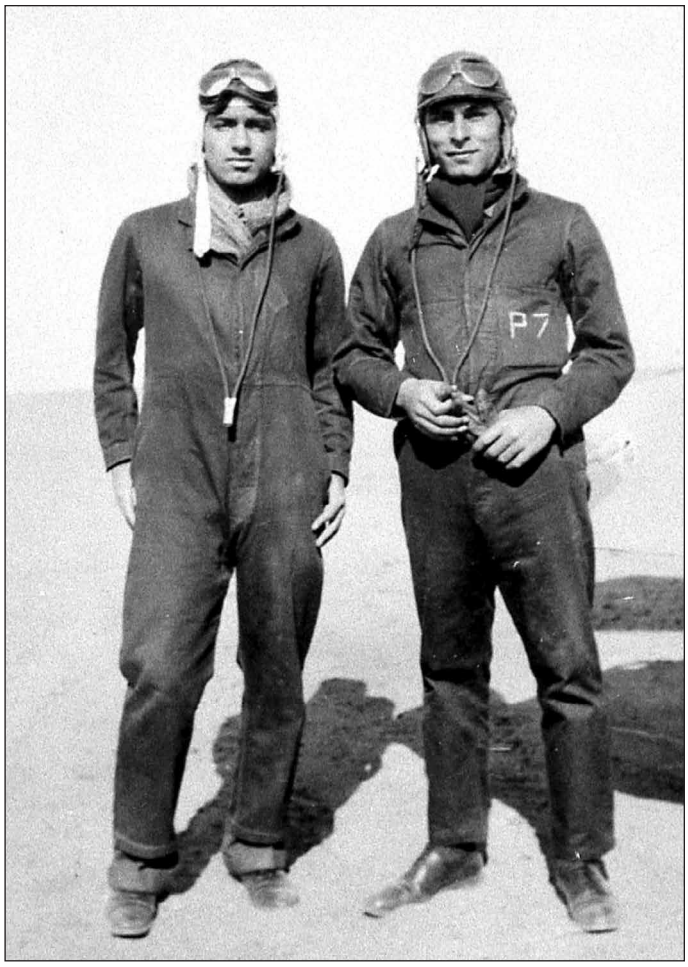
In 1935, *Mulazim Thani* Muhammad Sidqi Mahmud al-Milaigy received his wings at the RAF's No. 4 FTS and proudly took his place in the passing out parade at Abu Suwayr. Equally proud of his 'pure' Egyptian family origins, al-Milaigy rose to command his country's air force after the Nasserite coup of 1952. He is also said to have been a kind-hearted man who tried to avoid upsetting people, which may have contributed to his unwillingness to openly express opposition to President Nasser's actions in the run-up to the June War of 1967. He and some of his close colleagues were then unfairly blamed for the ensuing military catastrophe.

During Victor Tait's interview with the author at the Royal Aero Club in Pall Mall, London, in 1974, he recalled Mahmud Sidqi, as he was generally known, with affection, describing him as a proud man and a fine officer. By that time, the prison sentence imposed on the ex-commander of the UARAF (Egyptian Air Force) had been commuted. Meanwhile, he and Tait had remained in contact.

Another EAAF pilot who received his wings at No. 4 FTS Abu Suwayr in 1935 was Muhammad Farag. Unlike some of his colleagues, Farag took no recorded interest in politics and instead focussed entirely on his career in the Egyptian Air Force. The records of No. 4 FTS show that Farag flew 63 hours on the Avro 504N, but also had a minor accident in an Armstrong Whitworth Atlas (RAF serial number K1478) on 9 January 1935. Like Gazerine, Farag was taught by Thomas Pike. His nephew, the MiG pilot Abd al-Muna'im Tawil, recalled that later in his own career, he met a British Army general during a reception in Cairo, and found that this man was a nephew of Air Marshal Pike. Sometimes, the military world can be surprisingly small.

Muhammad Hassan al-Maghribi graduated as a pilot at No. 4 FTS in late 1935 or early 1936, having entered the Military School back in 1932. Egyptian records shown that in 1938, he would be sent to England to be trained as a flying instructor at the RAF's Central Flying School in Upavon, where he was also awarded a Flight Engineer's Certificate (First Class) on both single and twin-engine aeroplanes. Al-Maghribi subsequently rose to the rank of *Qa'id Liwa Jawi* (Staff Group Captain) after serving as one of the Egyptian Air Force's most senior flying instructors. Several of his pupils would take on the Israeli Air Force during the Palestine War of 1948.

In May 1935, the Egyptian government allocated part of its budget for a new squadron, the EAAF's fourth. This was followed on 18 September by the Egyptian parliament voting through

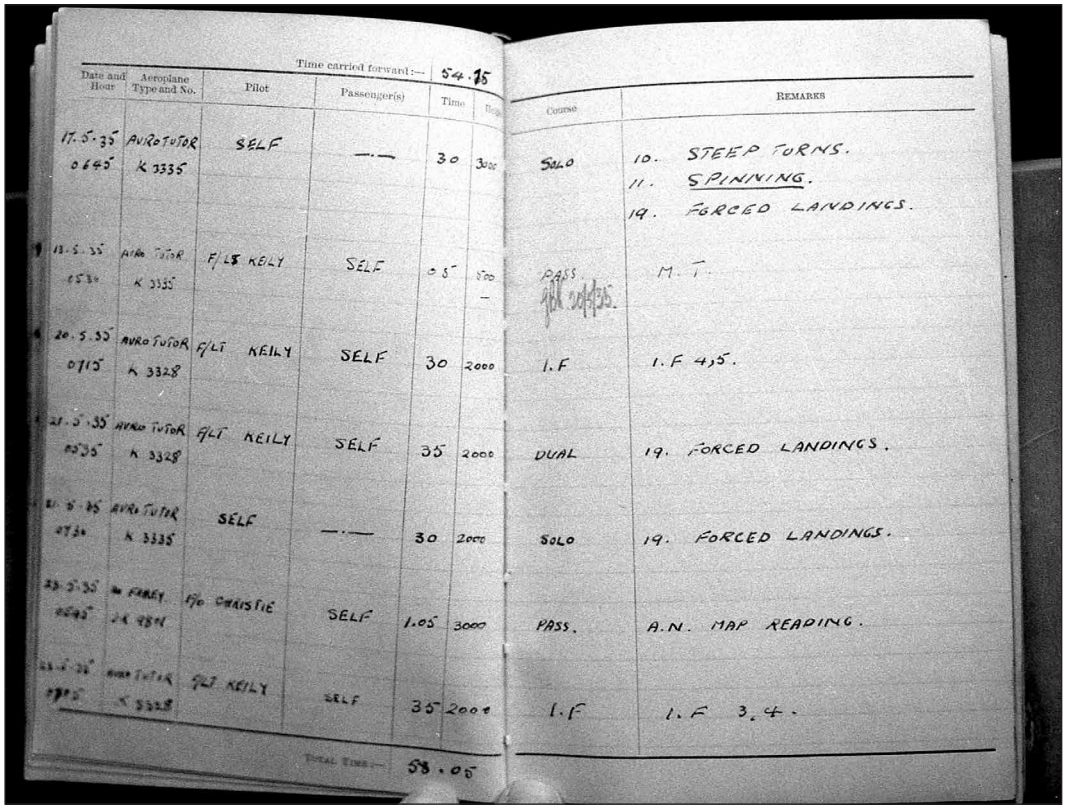


Hassan Tawfiq (right) was one of a new group of junior Egyptian officers who were trained by the British RAF at No.4 FTS at Abu Suwayr, close to the Suez Canal. Tawfiq is shown here with Fl. Lt. Keily (left) who was one of the British flying instructors. (Tewfik family archive)

£40,000 for the purchase of new aeroplanes. Less is usually said or written about the Egyptian groundcrews who helped keep the EAAF in the air. Even in 1935, they were still being trained by the British at the RAF depot and store at Abu Qir near Alexandria.

After Italy invaded Abyssinia (Ethiopia) on 3 October 1935, relations between Egypt and Mussolini's Italy rapidly deteriorated. Egypt was the only non-League of Nations country to impose full economic sanctions on Italy for its aggression (Egypt was not admitted to the League until 26 May 1937). In this situation, King Fu'ad tried to reduce political tensions within Egypt by striving for a united front. As a concession to the Wafd and its supporters, he abrogated the constitutional changes of 1930 which had given greater power to the crown. Meanwhile, there was widespread and growing anti-Italian feeling throughout the country, and, on a more practical level, Egypt sent a medical mission to Abyssinia to help civilians caught up in the conflict. Its ambulances would be bombed by Italian aeroplanes, as was the Red Cross unit sent by Britain.

Whether or not the student demonstrations – during which an Egyptian schoolboy named Gamal Abd al-Nasser, the future President of Egypt, was grazed on his forehead by a police bullet – was associated with these events is unclear. Many years later, Wagih Abaza, a member of the quasi-Fascist *Misr al-Fatat* Young Egypt Movement, or 'Green Shirts', claimed that Nasser had been the leader of his school's branch of this highly conservative and anti-British organisation. Whether or not this is correct remains unclear, but Wagih Abaza himself joined the Egyptian Air Force and rose to prominence as one of the country's more extreme revolutionaries. Another of Nasser's future colleagues in the Free Officers Movement, Abd al-Latif Baghdadi, had already decided to do what he could to get rid of the British while still a schoolboy in his home village of Shawa, near al-Mansura in the Nile Delta. As he wrote many years later: "The crisis that gripped the entire world begun to tighten around Shawa in 1932 and 1933. The little schoolboy [himself] began to feel the weariness of his fatherland."



Date and Hour	Aeroplane Type and No.	Pilot	Passenger(s)	Time	Course	Remarks
Time carried forward:—				54.15		
17.5.35 0645	AVRO TUTOR K 3335	SELF	—.—	30	SOLO	10. STEEP TURNS. 11. SPINNING. 14. FORCED LANDINGS.
18.5.35 0530	AVRO TUTOR K 3335	F/LT KEILY	SELF	0.5	PASS	M.T.
20.5.35 0715	AVRO TUTOR K 3328	F/LT KEILY	SELF	30	I.F	I.F 4,5.
21.5.35 0835	AVRO TUTOR K 3328	F/LT KEILY	SELF	35	DUAL	19. FORCED LANDINGS.
21.5.35 0730	AVRO TUTOR K 3335	SELF	—.—	30	SOLO	19. FORCED LANDINGS.
23.5.35 0645	FAIREY	F/O CHRISTIE	SELF	1.05	PASS.	A.N. MAP READING.
25.5.35	AVRO TUTOR K 3328	F/LT KEILY	SELF	35	I.F	I.F 3,4.
				58.05		

Two pages from Hassan Tawfiq's log book dated 15 May to 25 May 1935. In addition to two solo flight, he flew four times with Fl. Lt. Keily, each time in Avro Tutors. These aeroplanes were very similar to the EAAF's own Avro 626s. There was also one "map reading" flight with Flg. Off. Christie in a Fairey. (Tewfik family archive)

As yet, the EAAF was not in a position to do much in the face of Italian actions, so it fell to the Hawker Audaxes and Demons of No. 208 Squadron RAF to patrol Egypt's frontier with Italian-ruled Libya. These patrols began late in the year from a rudimentary airstrip at Marsa Matruh, the rest of No. 208 Squadron and its Headquarters not moving up to the frontier area until 24 January 1936.

One of the last groups of EAAF pilots to train at the RAF's No. 4 FTS before the relationship between Egypt and Britain was fundamentally changed by a new treaty in 1936 was sent to Abu Suwayr in 1935. Its members would pass out as qualified pilots the

following year, which, for a variety of reasons, was to prove a very important one in the history of modern Egypt. They included Hassan Mahmud, Mishriqi and Isma'il, all being part of E Flight, No. 32 Course at No. 4 FTS between July 1935 and April 1936. Some British sources describe them as the first Egyptian pilots to be trained entirely in Egypt, though this is not strictly correct.

After joining one of the EAAF's Avro 626 squadrons, Hassan Mahmud was soon sent on patrol looking for drug smugglers in Sinai, though initially as an observer rather than a pilot. On one occasion, his pilot spotted something and went down to low altitude. While both the crew were studying the ground, their Avro stalled and crashed. The pilot was killed but Mahmud was only injured. The crash site was then found by Webster and the injured observer was taken to hospital. Tait recalled that when he went to visit Hassan Mahmud in his sickbed, the young man was so afraid of being blamed for the crash that his nose started to bleed. In the event, he was not blamed.

Hassan Tawfiq also got his pilot's wings in 1935, having graduated from the Egyptian Military School at the same time as Gazerine and Abu Rabia. Tawfiq and Abu Rabia would remain close friends, though Tawfiq's closest colleagues were actually from the next batch of EAAF graduates, which included men like Ali Muhammad Labib. This was because Tawfiq's promotion would subsequently be delayed for six months for disciplinary reasons.

When interviewed by the author, Hassan's daughter, Mona Tawfiq, pointed out that there was no tradition of military service in her father's family. Rather the reverse, as she explained:

> Daddy was a very promising, intelligent youngster, who was the eldest child in his family, born in 1914. His father was the headmaster of the school that he himself was in. His father was a very stiff gentleman, so Hassan was very strictly brought up. When he finished school [graduated] he was just under sixteen, so he was a very young candidate for university. His father wanted him to go into engineering, and in those days you did what your father wanted you to do. They lived in al-Mansurah [province in the Nile Delta] where the family owned land, in a village called Sinbillawain [17km south of al-Mansourah town].
>
> They sent Hassan to do engineering in Cairo University, and he was accepted. This was in 1930. He did two years engineering but all this time he had been striving to join those who had been selected for the Air Force. To join the Air Force, you had to have a recommendation from someone in your family or someone of very high office (in other words wasta, or 'influence'). But since he could not tell his father, he found other young men who had been accepted, and got their friendship and some way or another he got accepted himself. He made the right contacts and was accepted in the Army Military School, since there was no Air Force College at that time. He had to go through two years' training, and his father was furious because he regarded it [flying] merely as 'driving an aeroplane'. He thought there was nothing to it. In the event all his younger brothers got university degrees and his sister became famous in Egyptian TV and so on. When my father graduated, he became one of the youngest Egyptian pilots at that time.

Extracts from Hassan Tawfiq's logbook provide details of his training. For example, his first flight at No. 4 FTS Abu Suwayr was on 18 February 1935, in an Avro 504N (serial number H2539). He had two accidents, both on Armstrong Whitworth Atlases; the first on 22 August in K1503 and the second on 26 September in K1011. Shortly before he graduated, Tawfiq had clocked up 108 flying hours, with 45 of them on Atlases. His first flight in an Egyptian aeroplane was on 18 November 1935 in the DH.60 Gipsy Moth number E106.

Unfortunately, the young Hassan was so delighted with his new pilot's wings that, a few months later, he decided to do some stunts over his parental home, perhaps to impress his father. On 13 June 1936, he flew an Avro 626 (J328) to Sinbillawain, where he attempted a low-level loop but misjudged his height and came down heavily, supposedly 'on the roof', demolishing the aeroplane and seriously injuring one of his legs. Tawfiq felt convinced that he would be thrown out of the Air Force for his stupidity, but Tait liked the youngster, whom he had already described as a "very good but reckless pilot". Tawfiq was punished only by having his future promotions delayed by half a year, effectively pushing him back into the following group to graduate. A few years later, this youthful and undoubtedly glamourous young Egyptian airman married a young lady from Scotland named Lillie Williams.

Other British records state that between 1932 and 1936, two EAAF pilots had been killed and two injured, some during training. Flying training hours had risen from 1,699 in 1932 to 4,705 in 1936. The Egyptian Army Air Force, like the Royal Iraqi Air Force and the Arab world as a whole, stood on the brink of major changes.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

DR DAVID C NICOLLE

Dr David C Nicolle is a British historian specialising in the military history of the Middle Ages, with special interest in the Middle East and Arab countries. After working for BBC Arabic Service, he obtained his MA at SOAS, University of London, followed by a PhD at the University of Edinburgh. He then lectured in art history at Yarmouk University in Irbid, Jordan. Dr Nicolle has published over 100 books about warfare ranging from Roman times to the 20th century, mostly as sole author. He also co-authored the 'Arab MiGs' series of books which covered the history of the Arab air forces at war with Israel from 1955 to 1973. Furthermore, he has appeared in several TV-documentaries, and has published numerous articles in the specialised press. This is his fourth instalment for Helion's @War series.

AIR VICE MARSHAL GABR ALI GABR

The late Air Vice Marshal Gabr Ali Gabr, PhD (EAF, ret.) served as pilot of de Havilland Vampire fighter jets during the Suez War of 1956. After concluding higher military education at the Air Warfare Institute in 1960, he served as Instructor in Air Tactics at the Air Warfare Institute in 1962-1964 and 1966-1967, as Staff Officer during the June 1967 War, Chief of Operational Training Branch in 1968-1973, and as Chief of Operations Group during the October 1973 War with Israel. After serving as Instructor in Art of Operations and as Chief of Air Force Chair at High War College from 1977 until 1982, and receiving his PhD at Nasser High Academy in 1989, he moved into writing and published seven books and dozens of studies and articles on the history of air warfare in Egypt and abroad.